
15
Satoshi Wagahara
Illustration ■ Oniku
はたらく魔王さま!
和ケ原聡司
イラスト■029
電撃文庫


HATARAKU MAOU-SAMA!
和ケ原聡司
イラスト■029
Satoshi Wagahara
Illustration■Oniku
15



THE HIGH SCHOOL GIRL AND OFFICE LADY,
WELCOMING THE NEW YEAR TOGETHER

THE DEMON KING,
TEMPORARILY ABSENT 1

THE DEMON KING,
TEMPORARILY ABSENT 2

THE DEMON KING,
TEMPORARILY ABSENT 3

THE DEMON KING,
TEMPORARILY ABSENT 4

CONTINUED: THE HIGH SCHOOL GIRL AND OFFICE LADY,
WELCOMING THE NEW YEAR TOGETHER

DESIGN ● KIMURA DESIGN LAB


HANZO
URUSHIHARA


HATARAKU MAOU-SAMA!
MgRonald.

はたらく魔王さま！

15

Satoshi Wagahara
Illustration ■ Oniku

和ケ原聡司
イラスト ■ 029

PROLOGUE
THE HIGH SCHOOL GIRL AND OFFICE LADY, WELCOMING THE NEW YEAR TOGETHER



Prologue: The High School Girl and Office Lady, Welcoming the New Year Together

It was a quiet morning.

Under the first rays of the morning sun, the various entities which kept the world functioning surfaced from the darkness of the night.

Banishing the darkness, the light from the sun shone brightly, causing people, buildings, roads, and cities to move in its light. This was the radiance of many peoples' lives.

Sound and light, these were the auras of humans, this was life.

Places which lacked this life would become colored shadows, objects too blurred to ascertain.

Such as a stove without flame.

Such as a well dried up.

Such as a building without residents.

"This is a lie."

The breath exhaled by this lady shook the morning, and her own voice sounded more shaken.

"This should be a lie."

"This is real."
As expected, the voice answering the lady was also little shaky.

With an attitude stern enough to freeze the morning sunlight, the owner of the voice confirmed the truth in front of them.

"There is no one... in this apartment anymore."

"This joke is too much."

The two ladies, with very different tones in their voices, stood and stared at a building standing in the rays of the morning sunlight.

Built in Tokyo City, Shibuya District, Sasazuka, a sixty-year-old wooden apartment, Villa Rosa Sasazuka.

The arms on the clock were about to point to eight in the morning, but no signs of life could be sensed from this place.

"No one… is here anymore?"

“Yes.”

“How about Emi’s father? He should be living on the first floor here…”

“He’s not around anymore.”

“How about Suzuno-chan?”

“Not around.”

“Maou-san and Urushihara-san?”

“…Not around.”

“……How about Ashiya-san?”

“Suzuki-san.”

Suzuki Rika painstakingly confirmed each of these, but was interrupted by the stern voice of Sasaki Chiho.

“Please understand, right now… there is no one in this apartment.”

“Why… why!?”

Chiho stated a fact which was hard to accept, and despite the confirmation, Rika kept shaking her head.

"This is impossible, because, until recently… no one said anything about this."

Staring at Villa Rosa Sasazuka, where signs of its inhabitants could not be felt, Rika said this with a feeble voice, then, as if she had remembered something all of a sudden, she looked towards Chiho.

"H-How about Emi? Emi should be around, right? Eifuku! Emi does not live in this apartment…"

"Yusa-san is not around too."

"That's a lie!"

She had heard Rika's scream, but Chiho's tense expression did not change at all.

"Alas=Ramus-chan and Acies-chan are unable to leave Yusa-san and Maou-san."

As if she were continuing her attacks on the frantic Rika, Chiho elaborated further.

“Everyone… went to Ente Isla.”

“How can this…”

Ente Isla.

The home of Sasaki Chiho’s and Suzuki Rika’s important friends.

The name of the world situated far away from Sasazuka, Tokyo, Japan, or Earth.

What Chiho meant was, these friends had already gone to the other end of the galaxy, unreachable by the two of them, who were ordinary humans living in Japan.

“No one… is here anymore?”

“Yeah.”

“But… Maou-san and Emi, still have their work at Mags…”

Chiho shook her head and looked towards Rika, who was close to crying because of this shocking situation.

“Do you think that those two would just abandon their workplace without doing anything? They already settled everything a while back.”

After walking past the stunned Rika, Chiho entered the apartment’s yard, exhaling a white breath.

The surface of the soil in the shade was still covered in morning frost; this proof of winter shattered under Chiho’s walking shoes.

“Not just Maou-san and the others.”

Chiho stood at the bottom of the stairs of Villa Rosa Sasazuka, and spoke after briefly closing her eyes once.

“Emerada-san, Lailah-san, and Gabriel-san… are not in Japan now.”

Chiho’s hoarse voice seemed to explain that she was also unable to fully accept this fact.
“Iron-kun, Amane-san, and the apartment’s landlady have also gone to Ente Isla.”

“But, but, Amane-san and the others, aren’t they unrelated to Ente Isla? And those angels, aren’t they Maou-san’s and Emi’s enemies?”

“To Alas=Ramus-chan, Acies-chan, Iron-kun… and the ‘humans’ living in Ente Isla, for the sake of the lives of the Sephirah, enemies, comrades, humans, demons, and angels aren’t important.”

After Chiho said this, she took out a leather key pouch from her jacket pocket.

Three keys with stickers attached were inside, and three sets of numbers, “201,” “202,” and “101” were written in Chiho’s handwriting.

“Are those…”
“These are the keys to the rooms of Maou-san and the rest.”

After saying this, Chiho started to walk up the stairs, and Rika followed closely behind in a frantic manner.

Chiho stopped in front of Room 201, she did not press the doorbell or shout towards the room, and opened the door with the key.

“……No, how can this...”

Seeing the scene on the other side of the door, Rika fell on her knees.

Because Room 201 was completely deserted.

It was not simply because the residents had gone out.

Only an empty room was left.

In the kitchen where Ashiya was always busy hustling and bustling, no pots or soup ladle were found; there were also no signs of Urushihara's computer and computer table.

Even the kotatsu, which was frequently used as a dinner table by Chiho, Maou, and their other important friends, had disappeared.

Room 201 had turned into an empty six tatami room.

No signs of people could be felt, and the room which showed no signs of life looked very cold; the water damage on the ceiling, the stains on the pillars, and the traces of sunlight exposure on the tatami only served to deepen the feeling of emptiness.

"We are normal people with no fighting ability. What Maou-san and Yusa-san wanted to avoid the most, was getting us into trouble. So…"

They were unable to participate in the battle to bring down God initiated by the people of Ente Isla.

“But… even so, it can’t be like this.”

A trail of tears finally flowed out the corner of Rika’s eyes.

She was not so mentally strong that she could withstand this abrupt and unreasonable situation.

Rika, who knew the truth about Maou and the others and still loved them after learning the truth, turned to Chiho and asked, “Chiho-chan… aren’t you bothered?”

“……”

“You can accept this kind of thing?”

It was natural for Rika to sound reproachful.

After all, the time Chiho had spent with them was much longer than Rika’s.

They had crossed over the various barriers of race and worlds, and treasured Chiho.

Therefore, Rika thought that Chiho might be able to do something. In some sense, this was reasonable.

Chiho answered Rika's question in a soft voice,

"…How could I… be able to accept it… uu."

"…Ah!"

At this moment, Rika finally noticed that the corners of Chiho's mouth were quivering, and her clenched fists were shaking.

That's right, it was impossible for Chiho to accept this.

However, Chiho still acknowledged this. Rika should have realized the amount of determination, fortitude, and lament contained within the choice to help keep the apartment keys.

"…Sorry, I……"

"I can't accept it…"

Chiho's placid voice echoed hollowly in Room 201 which had lost the light of life.

The visitors from another world have already disappeared from this Earth.

They have returned to the place they belong. Earth, Japan, and Chiho’s and Rika’s lives, have returned to their original states.



However, the normal lives which they have taken for granted before knowing the “truth” have now become a world they could not accept at all.

Why did things end up like this?

It was the third of January today, the period of New Year had not yet ended.

At this time, which was the start of a new year, Chiho and Rika were only faced with a scene of despair.

Why did things end up like this?

Standing next to Rika who had hung her head weakly, Chiho tried to recall the events in December, when Maou and the others decided to initiate the “Battle to bring down God.”



THE DEMON KING, TEMPORARILY ABSENT 1

Chapter 1: The Demon King, Temporarily Absent 1

"This… this is unbelievable."

"T-That's because…"

Unable to withstand her friend's gaze which had turned as cold as ice because she was too shocked, Chiho turned away immediately.

However, Shouji Kaori, who was Chiho's classmate, clubmate, and good friend, did not allow her to escape, and immediately put her face up close to Chiho's.

"Hey, I find it hard to believe what I just heard, can you repeat yourself?"

"Uh, erm."

"What were you saying about your shift schedule?"

"Erm……"

Kaori mercilessly pressured Chiho who had leaned back in fright.

"Your Christmas Eve! The work shifts! What~ about it?"

“Erm, yeah.”

Chiho repeated what she had said just now to the agitated Kaori.

“Maou-san has to work, Yusa-san has to work too. I will be spending it at home with my family.”

“Sasachii, I can’t believe youuuu!”

“Ah wah wah wah wah wah!”

While leaning forward, Kaori grabbed the front of Chiho’s shirt and shook her vigorously.

“Then how about Christmas? What are your plans for the 25th?”

At this stage, Kaori was already sitting on Chiho’s desk.

“L-Let go of me, it, it hurts!”
Chiho barely managed to free herself from Kaori, but the latter, refusing to back down until she heard the answer, stared at Chiho closely.

Therefore, Chiho found it harder to answer, because she would definitely be scolded if she did.

“Maou-san, Yusa-san, and I have to work……”

“Until what time?”

“…………I’m the only one who is working until ten pm, the two of them will be busy until closing time.”

“I can’t believe youuuuuuuuu!”

Kaori’s scream became more and more agitated, and Chiho pushed back Kaori who looked like she was going to vault over the desk and fall on the floor.

“I-I can’t help it too… because I’m a high school student, I can only stay until ten pm…”

“That’s not the point! This work schedule arrangement is too strange! Sasachii, what were you thinking!?”

Kaori reproached, her spit flying.

“I’m truly feeling shock from the bottom of my heart, you know? It’s incomparable to the last one, you know?”

Kaori grabbed her head and mumbled non-stop.

“I think it’s okay, it’s okay even if you spend Christmas with your family! Unexpectedly, there are many people like that, and honestly, my family is like this too! But only this once, this time, this year, you can’t be like this?”

“Is, is that so… but I heard that during the period from Christmas to New Year’s, they would be lacking in manpower.”

“This is what I think! People might say that I have no strength of character, but kids nowadays won’t choose to work at a place where they have to work during the beginning and end of the year! The blame lies with the stores who choose to operate on those days!”

Probably because Chiho was already influenced by the convenient consumer lifestyle in Japan, she thought that this was absurd somewhere in her heart.

“About that, Sasachii, I hope you can listen to me.”

“Y-Yes?”

“Sasachii, I said this before, right? I hoped that you would find Maou-san and ask for an answer for the thing earlier.”

“Eh? Ah, y-yeah.”

Kaori suddenly mentioned this topic in the classroom, causing Chiho to look around her in reflex.

Because the special show put up by Kaori had come to an end, no one was paying attention to them, but if this was heard by her classmates who not only are of the same age, but also loved these kinds of topics, things would become troublesome.

Of course, Kaori knew about this as well, but it seemed she still voiced her dissatisfaction nonetheless.

“Hey, Sasachii, we are high school girls, do you understand? High school girls are at the age where they are close to reaching the adult world they admire and wish to have some dramatic developments in their lives, right?”

“Y-Yeah, right……”

If it was dramatic developments, during this period of almost one year, Chiho was confident that she had accumulated enough experience to surpass the average Hollywood celebrity and no longer wanted to encounter similar things. However, she still chose to nod first.

“But Sasachii, what are you doing now? During Christmas Eve, the easiest day in the year for incidents to happen, you leave the person you have a crush on and your love rival in the workplace while you return home to have a

party. Even if you want to act like you have a lot of leeway, aren’t you going overboard?”

“I-I already said that Yusa-san is not a love rival…”

“Nonsense, in the eyes of others, that’s totally a love rival!”

Kaori stared at Chiho closely, and used her finger to knock on the table like a frustrated aunt.

“You’re definitely unable rush him for a reply anyway. Even so, since there is a rare chance on Christmas Eve, people will normally want to take a chance to settle things, right?”

Chiho could understand what Kaori wanted to express.

After all, it’s not like she had never thought about such things before.

However—

“Actually, before I talked with Kao-chan at the end of last month, I have already submitted the working schedule for this month……”

“There’s no way to save thissss! No way, no way! There’s no saving this! Sasachii, there’s no hope for you. It will be useless no matter how many years you wait! Give up, give up.”

“W-Why is it like this?”

Kaori finally grabbed her head and shouted.

In December, when the town started putting up Christmas decorations, Chiho had also wanted to find a chance to go on a Christmas date with Maou.

She may have been thinking about it, but the other party was the King of Demons after all, and as far as Chiho knew, this would be the second Christmas he had experienced in Japan.

She did not know how Maou spent his Christmas last year, but the most probable answer would be working.

Then, during December 24th and December 25th this year, Maou was also working full shifts at MgRonalds.

※

When Chiho realized that she might have missed her only chance in life to clarify the relationship between her and Maou, it was already the end of November.

The work schedules for December had already been submitted, and by that time, whether it was to Maou or Shop Manager Kisaki, Chiho was unable to say that she wanted to change her shifts for the days before and after Christmas.

Of course, Chiho's mistake was not the only thing at fault.

During September to November this year, Emi and Ashiya were imprisoned in Ente Isla, in addition, Maou had travelled to save them, Urushihara had been admitted to hospital, and Emi's mother had suddenly appeared. It was not just Chiho, everyone related to Ente Isla was in a chaotic situation.

Especially for Emi, after she reunited with the mother of whom she had no impression and had caused her and the world to carry a cruel fate, the days had not been peaceful at all.

During this time, the person Chiho had a crush on, who also had a deep connection with Emi's mother, Archangel Lailah — Demon King Satan a.k.a. Maou Sadao — had been helping Emi with her burdens on both public and private occasions.

To Chiho, who treasured both Maou and Emi, this was a good thing, but once she came to her senses, Chiho realized that she was feeling jealous of Emi, who was being treated kindly by Maou.

Regardless if it was a good or bad thing, ever since the summer Chiho confessed to Maou, he had never changed his attitude towards her.

In addition, if Maou and Emi accepted the important job Lailah entrusted them with, the distance between the two of them and Chiho would greatly increase.

Chiho, unable to grasp what the relationship between her and her crush from another world was like, consulted her good friend Shouji Kaori while keeping all information related to Ente Isla a secret.

This was something which happened at the end of November, the situation that time did not allow Chiho to happily look forward to a Christmas date, but in a place Chiho did not know about, another situation occurred which shook her greatly.

Emi’s friend, Suzuki Rika, who now knew the truth about Ente Isla just like Chiho, confessed her feelings for Ashiya Shiro.

She had expressed her feelings towards Demon General Alsiel from a foreign world.

Chiho felt that as someone who loved a person from a foreign world like her, Rika, who did not change her feelings after knowing the truth and bravely pursued the answer she wanted, was dazzling.

She was so dazzling that Chiho was terrified.

Once she thought about the possibility that she might be rejected by Maou in the end, Chiho became weak at the knees.

In addition, while Chiho could think of many reasons for Maou to reject her feelings, until now, Chiho could not think of any reasons which would make him accept her.

After Rika was rejected, she still cried and said that she was unable to give up on these feelings.

If it was her, after getting rejected by Maou, she would definitely be unable to pull herself together again.

So perhaps Chiho was subconsciously trying not to think about Christmas.

If she received an answer from Maou.

That answer would definitely be related to Maou’s future choice.

Not just Maou, that future might cause Chiho to be separated from Emi, Ashiya, Urushihara, Suzuno, and her other important friends from Ente Isla.

The childlike thought of wanting to stay with the person she liked forever obstructed Chiho's actions.

On the other hand, Chiho had heard a completely different opinion.

"If you don't convey it when you have the chance, you'll definitely regret it in the future."

The girl called Acies=Ara had been separated from someone important to her for a very long time. It was a period of time which Chiho, who was only seventeen-years-old, could not imagine, so she understood the weight behind the words said by the other party.

What Kaori said, what Acies said, Chiho understood all of it.

Because Chiho understood, Chiho's body, Chiho's mind, and Chiho's heart were frozen in place, just like the winter sky covered by a thick layer of clouds.

Half of December passed just like this.

※

“What kind of excuse is that!? I can’t believe that you would miss out the chance at Christmas because of that kind of situation!”

From Kaori’s point of view, Chiho was only troubled over love, so having such a reaction was normal, but from Chiho’s point of view, under “that kind of situation,” she could not be bothered about Christmas at all.

“You can’t change it anymore?”

Kaori, who obviously did not know about these things, asked a question which was rather normal under these circumstances.

“There’s still some time until Christmas, can’t you start looking for a replacement now, or adjust the working schedule?”

“A-About that.”

Chiho had considered what Kaori mentioned before.

However, even if she could apply for leave on the days she had to work, it was difficult for her to ask others to apply for leave for her own convenience.

In addition, Chiho could tear her mouth apart and still be unable to tell Maou, “I have some business with you on Christmas Eve, so please apply for leave.”

"Ah, that's right! I can just tell my mum that the store is lacking manpower and ask her for permission to work on Christmas Eve…"

"Sasachii still harbors such thoughts at this stage."

"Eh? B-But…"

"But what!? If Sasachii goes to work as well, then it will be everyone working together as usual in the end! And even if you go to work, you still have to go home first by yourself! Seriously, Sasachii, do you have any motivation at all?"

"M-Motivation?"

"You're the one who said that you don't want to be separated from everyone, right!? Currently, Sasachii is walking down the path of gradually fading away!"

"T-That's true, I'm aware of that as well."

If Maou and the others agreed to participate in Lailah's proposed plan to save the humans of Ente Isla, a situation similar to the time Maou went to Ente Isla to save Emi would occur.

Simply put, Chiho could not join them, or more accurately, was unable to join them.

The reason was simple: it had always been like this, even if Chiho went to the battlefield, she would only become a burden for Maou and Emi.

In many ways, Maou and Emi’s opponent was an existence which exceeded human comprehension.

If Chiho, who could not even protect herself properly, appeared in that kind of place, Maou and the others would have to divide their forces to protect Chiho.

This time was different from the past when she used the power of Yesod as a medium to borrow power from Lailah.

Since Lailah had appeared, Chiho had no reason to fight together with Maou.

Undeniably, it was true that the “leeway” Kaori described did exist in some part of Chiho’s heart.

Chiho currently had reason to believe that Maou would not easily return to Ente Isla.

That was because Maou had suddenly received “work” which was different in terms of direction and dimension compared to Lailah’s request.

“Since everyone already has plans, it’s useless regardless of how much you struggle. You should at least have some thoughts about New Year’s Eve and New Year’s, right?”

However, because Chiho was too absorbed in thinking about Maou’s current situation, she answered honestly, “Ah~ I might be going to my dad’s or mum’s hometown, or, something… Kao-chan?”

After Chiho answered this, she realized that Kaori, with an expression scarier than a demon’s, was glaring in her direction with a gaze that appeared to pierce through her.

“Sasachii.”

“Y-Yes.”

“I’m going to get angry.”

Kaori was already angry enough just now, but because Chiho had no retorts, she could only obediently listen to Kaori’s lecture once again.

When club activities ended, the sky had started to darken.

Chiho, who did not have any work shifts today and had been walking home at a brisk pace, received a message from her mother to buy some things, so she was currently weaving through the crowds at the shopping district at 100th Street.

She had thought that the shopping street would be filled with Christmas colors and decorations, but some stores had skipped Christmas entirely and changed to New Year decorations instead.

Especially the soba noodle eateries and fish stores, they seemed to be preparing for New Year’s rather than Christmas.

Chiho walked down the street as she read the shopping list sent by her mother.

“Ah, Sasaki Chiho?”

Hearing a voice belonging to someone who should not have been there, Chiho almost dropped her phone.

“Eh… eh, ehhhhh?”

Chiho turned back, and got a shock when she realized that she was not mistaken.

“Urushi, Urushihara-san! Since when were you able to leave the house?”

“Can you not make it seem like I’m a ferocious criminal who was released from jail without you knowing?”

Chiho’s honest reaction caused Urushihara to frown, but in the end, he had no right to frown at this.

“The scene of Urushihara-san being released on the street alone to do things was too unexpected, so it’s rather difficult to imagine…”

“I’m really curious, do you think of me as a beast or a zombie? Recently, I have been going out by myself, and helping out with many things at the apartment. It’s just that you don’t know about it.”

“I see… s-sorry.”

Chiho, who sensed that she had gone too far when she said “being released on the street alone,” apologized in earnest.

After thinking about it calmly, Chiho realized that since she had learned the truth about Maou and the others in early spring, this was the first time she had seen Urushihara walking outside by himself without Maou and Ashiya.

Then Chiho remembered that other than Urushihara's lazy personality, there were other reasons why Urushihara did not go out by himself.

"Putting these things aside for now, is it alright for you to go out alone now?"

"Can I take that to mean 'aren't you worried about the police finding you because of what you did before we met?'"

"Eh? T-That's right."

Urushihara carefully confirmed Chiho's intentions and, although Chiho was puzzled by this, Urushihara showed an unhappy expression and said, "Because Bell mentioned before that if I was allowed to go out alone, I might just get into an accident on the way and be unable to return to the apartment."

"Ah."



“What’s with that look of complete agreement?”

“S-Sorry.”

Suzuno would definitely react this way if she knew that Urushihara was going out by himself. Chiho, who inexplicably could understand this, was forced to apologize again.

“Anyway, strictly speaking, it’s not as if there won’t be any problems at all.”

“Eh?”

Urushihara’s frank words caused Chiho to freeze.

Having arrived in Japan, Urushihara had carried out many bandit-like activities before living in Villa Rosa Sasazuka, this was one of the main reasons Urushihara did not leave the house.

Chiho did not know the details, but from Maou and Ashiya’s reactions, there was a possibility that Urushihara was caught on surveillance cameras when he committed these acts.

With this, it was difficult to say that the police had given up on pursuing Urushihara.

“However, the thing you’re worried about shouldn’t happen.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah, thanks to Maou, I can freely use demonic magic up to a certain extent now, there won’t be any issues no matter how many police come.”

“Uh, p-please don’t do that!”

Noticing that Urushihara was showing an evil smile, since Chiho’s father was a policeman, she could not help but stop him frantically.

“Ho ho ho, I don’t plan to run into trouble with the Japanese police, but if something bad happens, I can use that method or some other methods to solve it. I have been doing some new things lately, so my physical and mental condition is rather good.”

Chiho did not know what Urushihara meant by “that method” and “other methods,” and at the same time, did not dare to ask what “new things” referred to, but based on the recent actions by the demons from the Demon World, she had an inkling of what was going on.

Chiho, who had been deeply concerned by a certain issue from before, found a clue about it from Urushihara’s unexpected words.

“But that means Urushihara-san has demonic magic now as well?”

“What do you mean by ‘as well?’”

His tone was questioning, but Urushihara had a fearless expression.

Chiho subconsciously showed a challenging expression and said what she knew before.

“Ashiya-san has enough demonic magic on him to change back to his demon form, right?”

“Oh, is that so, you know about what happened on the day Ashiya went to buy his mobile phone huh?”

“……I guess so.”

From Chiho’s standpoint, she was also curious about how Urushihara interpreted the events of that day.

“Hm? But that’s strange, it feels as if Bell does not know about this.”

“Because I did not tell her.”

“Is that so? I thought if you knew that we were harboring demonic magic without Emilia and the others knowing about it, you would feel uneasy and discuss it with them.”

Urushihara’s taunting tone caused Chiho to show an unhappy expression.

“Please don’t make me sound like a spy. I know very well that the current Ashiya-san is not the type of person who would do such a thing without a good reason.”

There were other reasons why Chiho did not tell Emi and Suzuno about this, but she had never expected to be seen as someone who would leak secrets.

“Oh~ so that means Emilia might not know too. I see~”

Without knowing if it was a praise or just a thoughtless response, Urushihara nodded and said some strangely irritating things, raising his hand.

She did not notice earlier because she was too shocked by Urushihara’s presence, but he was carrying a shopping bag filled with cooked food and snacks.

“Haah, from my point of view, the moment Ashiya transformed in front of Suzuki Rika is equivalent to Emilia finding out about this, but nothing much will happen even if this is found out. Like what you said, we are not doing this without reason, and this is related to me going out to buy things.”

"……What is that supposed to mean?"

"Hmm~"

Once Chiho asked this, Urushihara suddenly began to survey his surroundings and intentionally acted as if he had noticed a café nearby.

"Treat me if you want to know, it's cold here."

"……"

At this moment, Chiho frowned in surprise, but once she remembered that Urushihara was normally this shameless, she could only nod reluctantly.

"It's no big deal even if this is leaked out. Simply put, Maou, Ashiya, and I still do not completely trust Lailah."

Not feeling bad about it at all, Urushihara spoke as he drank the most expensive signature coffee.

After adding a lot of milk to the cheapest special blend coffee, Chiho asked, "You said you were 'unable to completely trust Lailah-san,' what did you mean by that?"

"The meaning is literal. Think about it, hasn't she been pursued by Heaven this whole time? But she's so relaxed that even Maou and Emilia felt wary."

"Uh, that's true."

In various ways, Lailah's actions were filled with openings, so even Chiho immediately nodded to express her agreement.

"The only sources for the information that Heaven has been locked down, prohibiting travel by 'Gates,' were the Landlady and Gabriel; we have not confirmed this. Even if Heaven has been sealed off, there is no guarantee that the enemies will not attack again, it might be that only the other party can come over, we do not believe that Lailah has put proper defences in place around her. Therefore, when all of you went to Lailah's home, Ashiya and I didn't join in."

"Now that you mention it, it was like that."

The day Lailah had opened up her home to obtain the trust of Maou and the others.

Ashiya and Urushihara did not join them.

Because Rika had confessed to Ashiya the day before and was rejected, Chiho did not feel that it was the right time to ask why they did not attend…

“Personally, I wasn’t interested in Lailah’s home, and it was Maou’s suggestion in the first place.”

“Maou-san?”

“He asked us to stay behind just in case something bad happens. With this arrangement, if the ‘enemy’ attacks MgRonalds, Suzuki Rika’s home, or your home while Maou and Emilia are together, we can handle it immediately.”

“…I see.”

“In addition, Lailah’s ridiculous actions might be because she wants Maou and Emilia to play along with her act. After all, the enemy might not be limited to Raguel, Kamael, and the others.”

“Eh?”

Chiho was unable to fully grasp the meaning behind Urushihara’s words, and he said in a mocking tone, “Can you guarantee that Lailah is definitely a good person just because she is Emilia’s mother? Isn’t that too strange? This

might sound strange coming from me, but Sasaki Chiho, to date, have you ever met a kind angel?”

“No.”

Regretfully, this was the only point Chiho could answer directly.

“Right? You might feel that I have no right to say such things, but with regards to how evil the angels can be, I am confident that I know this better than Maou and Ashiya. It is not impossible that Lailah’s airheadedness and inability to read the atmosphere is all just an act, she might have ceased fire to make hostages out of your family, MgRonalds’ employees, or Suzuki Rika, people treasured by Maou and Emilia, to force the two of them to help her.”

The term “ceased fire” sounded a little exaggerated, but Chiho could understand what Lucifer meant.

“What does Urushihara-san think about Lailah-san’s situation?”

“What do you mean?”

It was not clear if he had understood Chiho’s question, since Urushihara quickly responded with a question.

Therefore, Chiho had no choice but to elaborate on what she wanted to ask.

“Erm… the final goal of Lailah-san and Gabriel-san… is to have Maou-san and the others defeat a certain person, uh, which means…”

“Ah, you already know about my mother.”

“……Yes.”

Urushihara said that bluntly, and in that instant, Chiho did not know how to answer.

“Do you respect me a little more now?”

“Eh, eh?”

Urushihara changed the topic too quickly, giving Chiho a shock.

Why did the topic switch to whether Chiho respected Urushihara now?

“You already heard about my noble lineage, right? Not only was my mother the God, I was also the top ranked angel in the Second Generation, humans should be in such awe of me that they won’t dare look at me directly, isn’t that so?”

Not considering how serious Urushihara was about this, Chiho decided to respond in an obligatory manner, “Don’t be stupid, hurry up and answer my question.”

“In this sense, you’re more merciless than Emilia.”

Chiho replied so quickly that even Urushihara had to surrender.

“Then I’ll answer you, honestly speaking, I don’t want to care about this at all. If Lailah is sincerely asking Maou and Emilia for help, and Maou and the others decide to accept, they can do whatever they want.”

“Is that alright? Because…”

“You’re annoying, I know that. I don’t know how many people there are, but including Lailah and Gabriel, there are some people in Heaven who are planning to kill my mother.”

Urushihara replied naturally, whether it was from his expression or his tone, no fluctuation in emotion could be felt.

“So what? Do you think I would suddenly remember my love towards my mother and stop them while crying, or turn over a new leaf and actively persuade my mother to repent?”

“No, I do not think that you will turn over a new leaf and actively take action, but I never expected that you would be this uncaring.”

“You guys are seriously unable to differentiate between what can be said and what cannot be said. I’m going to surprise all of you when you come to the apartment next time.”

Chiho’s reply made Urushihara frown.

“Haah… forget it, with regards to my parents, I honestly don’t remember much at all. I know that Ignora, the ruler of Heaven, is my mother, and I have some vague memories about it. However, this knowledge has no effect on my current life at all.”

“How can this…”

To Chiho, who was very close to her family, this was difficult to believe, but no pretense could be felt from Urushihara’s expression.

“In the world we live in, we will not unconditionally develop feelings for the other party just because we are family. As for the demons in the Demon World, if the other party is a hindrance, he will be killed even if he is a sibling. If everything Lailah said is the truth, and all of you are willing to clean up the mess caused by my mother’s mistakes, then I can only say thanks for the hard work.”

The day Maou, Chiho, and Emi went to Lailah’s apartment at Nerima for the first time, Gabriel told Chiho and the rest that Ignora, the angel ruling Heaven with a position equivalent to God, was Urushihara’s mother.

At the same time, Chiho and the rest also knew what Ignora did to Alas=Ramus and the other Sephirah children, and the scary things the angels have continually done to Ente Isla, but for Chiho, who was unable to battle, the first thing she thought about was Urushihara’s feelings.

However, if her worries were truly unnecessary, she would feel troubled as well.

“Haah, but if you insist on talking about the topic of familial love… hm, how should I say this?”

And the answer Urushihara gave after thinking about it seriously—

“At worst, throwing me into the Demon World, leaving me alone, and not looking for me later… I’m a little resentful about that, I guess. However, I was very happy in the Demon World. Compared to staying in a world where most of the people were walking zombies, staying in the Demon World was much better, so I don’t hate her so much that I want to seek revenge… it’s more like these things happened so long ago that there are many things I really don’t remember anymore.”

That was all.

“Why don’t you remember it?”

“Let me ask you something. Do you remember, down to the last detail, the events which happened when you were in kindergarten or when you just entered elementary school, or all the conversations you’ve had with your family and friends?”

“Eh, e-erm…”

“I may look like this, but I have lived many times longer than Maou. During this time, I lived freely in the Demon World, and went through happy, busy, and fulfilling times. I can’t remember events which happened that long ago. To me, Ignora might just be my blood related mother, but if you were in the same situation, it would be as if you just found out that the true identity of the enemy was an ancestor from the Edo period. Compared to something which happened that long ago, the present is more important.”

The present which Urushihara so valued, he spent ninety percent of it holed up in the room while depending on Maou. Chiho did not want to be told that by someone like him, but right now, Chiho knew very well that Urushihara truly did not feel any ill feelings towards Ignora.

“The past is the past. Some people use that as motivation, some people do not. Amongst the people involved, the representative of the people who do

not do this is me, and the representative of the people who do this is Lailah, that's all."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. I don't know how much you have heard from Lailah and Gabriel, but from your expression, you probably know most of it, right? Everything about the Ancient Demon King Satan's Disaster, and also about what Ignora did."

"Uh… yeah."

It was truly out of place to be listening to such a topic while eating fries in the Moz Burger at Nerima Station.

"Honestly speaking, I don't want to care about this at all, and since I'm already like this, for Ashiya and Maou who weren't born at that time, they will care about it even less, right? Emilia, who might become immortal, may have some motive, but with things as they are now, I don't think Maou will agree to Lailah's request. Or more like, Ashiya and I are walking around outside with demonic magic within our bodies because of this. This is to guard against Lailah doing something stupid because she is unable to tolerate Maou's hesitation."

"I-I see…"

She could understand what Urushihara was saying, but for unclear reasons, Chiho was not completely satisfied.

However, she did not clearly know what she was unsatisfied about.

Perhaps seeing through Chiho's thoughts, Lucifer said, "And this is more advantageous to you, isn't that so?"

"Eh?"

"'I don't want Maou or Emilia to agree to Lailah's request,' right?"

"E-Erm………… yeah, honestly speaking, I don't want that."

During that short period of hesitation, many thoughts flashed through Chiho's mind.

If she believed Lailah's words completely, her thoughts of not wanting Maou and Emi to go to Ente Isla were the same as ignoring Ente Isla and its inhabitants.

The "good child" part in Chiho kept shouting that it was a bad thing, but it was meaningless to go along with this feeling and lie to Urushihara right now.

If Urushihara, who was especially acute in strange areas and was not considerate to Chiho at all, saw through her lie, she would lose her chance to question him.

“I just do not want to be separated from Maou-san and the others, after all, why do Maou-san and the rest have to give up their current lives and get involved in such things?”

“You are correct. I hate that too, why is there a need to give up this comfortable and stable normal life, go far away, and battle with their lives on the line?”

“Of course, this is just my own stubbornness, if Maou-san or Yusa-san decide to do it, I have no right to stop them, but even so, I feel that what Lailah-san and Gabriel-san said is too selfish.”

“I agree completely, they should clean up their own mess.”

Urushihara also had no right to say such a thing, but that was the way things were.

Because they could not clean up the mess, they explained things in a shocking way, saying that the world or humans would go extinct, making use of Maou’s or Emi’s kindness to win them over, this method could not convince anyone.

The story Gabriel told at Moz Burger about the “mastermind of everything” helped Chiho and the others answer many questions and mysteries.

After that day, Chiho had seen neither Lailah nor Gabriel.

However, from how the distance between Emi and Lailah had decreased that day, compared to the sticky situation at the beginning, the current situation seemed to have progressed some from before.

Maou’s attitude towards this was still unclear, and because of this, Chiho was unable to dispel the various worries she had been harboring in December…

“And you should know very well that Maou will become very busy from now on, right?”

“Ah, yeah, that’s true.”

Chiho thought about some things when she consulted Kaori, and currently she had obtained an important piece of information which was enough to make her believe that Maou would not agree to Lailah’s request.

Anyone who knew Maou would definitely think so after they knew this fact.

“In this current situation, once Maou is busy, it will have a chain reaction on Emilia as well, and as far as I know, Lailah and Emilia have not reconciled

yet… at least based on the lifespan of you humans, this is something you don’t have to worry about for the time being.”

This sentence coming from Urushihara, who was many times older than Maou and had lived for hundreds of years, was strangely persuasive.

If Maou really made the choice predicted by Chiho and Urushihara, the situation would remain the same for the next two or three years.

If there was such a long period of time, Chiho would then be a university student.

She would have more choices with regards to her future plans and would have more leeway in her heart.

“Maou always had that as his goal, right? I don’t think he would abandon that and run off to other places.”

“I… think so as well. Yusa-san would think so too, right?”

Chiho said this as she took her notebook out of her bag, flipping to MgRonalds’ work schedule.

Maou’s row in the work schedule had been changed for the next few days.

With her fingers, Chiho touched the words which had been changed in a tender manner.

And on the top, in Chiho’s handwriting—

『Maou-san is finally attending the full-timer promotion training!』

—These words were written.

※

Around the same time Chiho met Urushihara.

Yusa Emi, who was scheduled to end work at five o’clock in the evening, watched the one who might be the last customer she would serve for the day walk through the automatic doors, and raised an eyebrow in surprise when she recognized the other party.

“Welcome… kindly proceed to this counter to be served.”

Without any need to raise a hand in greeting, the other party recognized Emi after entering and walked towards the counter.

“I want a Teriyaki burger meal, with fries and hot coffee, both upsized.”

“Alright.”

Emi entered the order into the cashier, notified the price, received a 1000 yen note and, finally, returned the change to the other party.

A short while later, Emi placed the prepared order onto the tray. After the man received the tray, he did not say much else and went to his seat without causing trouble.

After that, he did not look in her direction again.

“How rare.”

Ashiya Shiro had come to MgRonalds at dinnertime, and ordered a meal enough to fill his stomach.

Honestly speaking, his actions were not normal.

Eating out alone during dinner and ordering the more expensive upsized meal.

In addition, when he was almost done eating at the bar style seating area, he even took out his Slimphone and played with it, this was too different from the impression Emi had of Ashiya, until she even suspected that some evil angel had impersonated as him.

“Saemi, you can get off work soon, right?”

“Eh? Ah, that’s true.”

As Emi was feeling perplexed, her senior at work, Ooki Akiko, called out to her from behind.

“Ah… after getting off work, can I eat dinner here?”

Emi looked up at the clock which had just passed five o'clock, took off her employee cap, and confirmed Ashiya’s presence, who was quietly playing with his Slimphone, out of the corner of her eye.

“I see, then do you want to make a transaction with the employee price?”

“Let’s do that. Uh, please help me order the black pepper bacon burger meal, with a salad and orange juice.”

“Okay. I’ll handle things here, go change clothes.”

“Thank you, then I’ll take my leave.”

After Emi thanked Akiko, she quickly walked towards the employee room and, as she changed clothes, she thought about the reasons Ashiya would come here for.

“He should know that the Demon King and Chiho-chan are not in the store today, but it doesn’t seem like he is looking for me either…”

Ashiya did interact with Emi just now, but that was probably because Emi just happened to be the only one there at that time.

In the end, Emi could not think of any reasons why Ashiya would come to MgRonalds to eat.

After Emi paid for the meal — with an employee discount of thirty percent — she first spent some time pretending to find a seat, then sat opposite Ashiya.

However, Ashiya, who could be seen through the gaps in the partition, did not notably react. He still slowly picked up his fries at regular intervals, and his gaze was always on his mobile phone.

“……”

With natural movements, Emi opened up the lid of her salad, and observed the situation as she used her fork to stab the lettuce.

Then—

“What do you want?”

Ashiya was the one who initiated the conversation.

Because of the small number of people within the store, Ashiya and Emi were the only ones sitting at the bar seating area, so they could still hear each other.[1]

“That is my line.”

Through the gaps in the partition, she could not see Ashiya’s expression clearly, but he probably could not see Emi’s expression either.

“Why did you come to MgRonalds at this time? Isn’t it almost dinnertime?”

“For today’s dinner, we’re settling it separately.”

“Oh, that’s rare.”

However, this was not just a rare occurrence.

If it was just Maou, Emi could still understand why he would eat dinner outside today.

According to the work schedule decided in the previous month, Maou was supposed to work today, but because there were some changes in the plan, he had gone out with Shop Manager Kisaki Mayumi.

During this time, the ones with the most experience after Maou, Kawada Takefumi and Ooki Akiko, would handle the store together, but either way, it was impossible for Ashiya to not know about Maou's schedule.

“So you allowed Lucifer to act freely?”

“That's none of your business.”

It was true that it was none of her business, but as one of the people who knew about the financial situation of the Demon Fortress, Emi was purely worried about that. In addition, based on Ashiya's personality, it was impossible for him to allow Urushihara to do whatever he wanted.

“Someone I know suddenly deviated from his usual behavior completely, it's normal to feel worried about it.”

“Oh, you think you know all the details about our lives?”

“Not completely, but it should be around ninety percent. At the very least, I can confirm that your actions today are strange.”

“Don’t pry into the privacy of your customers, you’re a store employee, isn’t that so?”

“Whether it’s good or bad, every time all of you try to use the concepts of this world as a shield, you’re normally doing something which you don’t want me or Bell to know.”

“……”

As if he was feeling rather unhappy, Ashiya fell silent.

“Haah, forget it.”

After saying this, Emi stopped her interrogations.

“I don’t know what’s going on, but this is being rude to the customers after all, sorry about that.”

“Ugh.”

“I’m going home after I’ve eaten, take your time.”

“……”

After that, only the sounds of Emi eating were heard, and those sounds also stopped after a short while.

Just as Emi got up and was about to take the tray to the rubbish bin—

“Yusa.”
Ashiya’s voice was heard from behind.

“Have you met with Suzuki-san recently?”

“Ugh!”

Emi looked back in surprise.

But Ashiya was still facing the bar, with his back facing Emi.

“…The last time I met her was about two weeks ago, but… we do message each other.”

“I see, that’s good.”

“What’s wrong with Rika?”

Did her tone sound too abrasive?

The moment Emi spoke, she regretted her question immediately.

Didn’t that mean that she knew something had happened between Ashiya and Rika?

Some time back, Rika had looked for Emi for advice because she planned to confess to Ashiya.

Emi knew that Rika and Ashiya went out afterwards, and she knew that the Slimphone Ashiya had in his hands right now was probably chosen by Rika.

Most importantly, Emi also knew the “results” of Rika’s confession.

The only thing Emi did not know about was the “process.”

But she had not met Rika these two weeks.

And the message Rika sent over—

“It’s no good after all, thank you for everything you did for me.”

—only that was written.

After that, Emi could not contact Rika at all, so as if she had plunged into a sea of fog, she felt a sense of unease.

She had probably said everything that she wanted to say.

Emi felt that all the questions in her mind were going to be said.

What happened between you and Rika?

What did you do to Rika?

What did you say to Rika?

If she could, she wanted to drag Ashiya out of the store immediately to explain it clearly, from beginning to the end, what happened that day.

But after a short while, Emi suppressed these feelings, moved her gaze away from Ashiya, and walked out of the store.

“Ah, Yusa-san is done with work already? Thanks for the hard work, be careful on the way home.”

“Yeah, I’m going home first.”

Emi brushed past Kawada, who had returned from his deliveries, at the entrance, and she left the store after some greetings. Ashiya did not turn back at all during this time.

Once Emi left the store, which was equipped with heating facilities, and walked outside into the streets which had turned completely dark, the cold air rushed towards her face.

To fetch Alas=Ramus who was entrusted into Suzuno's care at Villa Rosa Sasazuka, Emi walked on Koshu Kaido listlessly.

Thanks to the cold air outside calming her down, she started to feel that not asking Ashiya about Rika just now was the correct judgement.

Emi knew that Rika liked Ashiya. In fact, Ashiya was the only one who did not know.

Since Rika wrote "It's no good after all," there was only one conclusion.

Emi was confident that if Ashiya delayed his answer like what Maou did with Chiho, or chose to accept Rika, Rika would definitely consult her immediately.

After all, Rika had looked for Emi to ask if Emi could forgive her feelings before she knew if she could confess.

Rika had gathered her courage and confessed, but she was still rejected by Ashiya in the end.

If so, Emi could not advise her anymore, and was unable to do anything else for Rika.

“What… kind of result was I looking forward to?”

Emi did not want Rika to get hurt.

However, she did not think that Ashiya could make Rika happy, and did not think that Ashiya had such intentions.

“Haah…”

The white breath, which came from her heart containing no conclusion, formed the outline of Chiho’s face in the night sky.

“These are just my selfish thoughts.”

If Rika could not be with Ashiya, then was it alright for Chiho to be with Maou?

From the beginning, Emi had decided somewhere in her heart that Rika’s wish would not be fulfilled, causing her to loathe herself.

Like what Lailah, Suzuno, and Ashiya had said in their lectures, the indecisive Maou was unable to harden his heart and treat Chiho this way.

On the other hand, although Ashiya no longer disliked humans as one-sidedly as before, since he would return to Ente Isla sooner or later because of his sense of duty, there was always a certain boundary between him and this world.

She felt bad for Rika, but if it was her from some time back, after knowing that Ashiya had rejected Rika, she would only think that she would have one less thing to worry about if she fought these demons in the future.

But it was different now.

Yusa Emi, who interacted with Maou, Ashiya, and Urushihara purely as an individual, was different now.

The fragments of the Hero's soul in Emi's heart told her that there was nothing to be bothered about.

However, for the current Yusa Emi, there was some part of her who felt angry at Ashiya who had hurt Rika's feelings.

“I'm so selfish.”

Selfish, she was really too selfish.
Her past self who would just naturally curse them with “Go die” and “I am going to kill all of you one day” would not have harbored such feelings.

But in fact, Emi’s two important friends harbored feelings that overcame the barriers of worlds and species.

Just as Emi frowned because of the commotion caused by her heart not reaching any conclusion or answer, she discovered a familiar figure at the intersection in front of her.

“…It’s so cold today.”

The sentence she could not help but say contained some annoyance, relent, and some joy which she did not understand.

It was not a feeling as exaggerated as “rejoice,” but a very childish “joy.”

“Oh, oh my, Emilia. Wel, welcome back, you’ve worked hard.”

That person was Lailah.

Holding a supermarket plastic bag, how long had Lailah been standing there?

Since that day, she would occasionally lie in wait along Emi’s route home.

Her motive was obvious. The day Emi visited Lailah's home in Nerima, the distance between the two had decreased a little, and Lailah now wanted to further improve their relationship.

However, her methods were so idiotic that even Emi, who thoroughly disliked Lailah, could only show a troubled smile.

Emi did not walk down this road every day.

Other than Chiho, Emi and Maou had recently become close with their seniors at work, and depending on the time they got off, everyone would go on to drink tea together.

Or she might go to other places to buy things for Alas=Ramus, Suzuno, and her father, Nord.

If she wanted to see Emi, all she had to do was wait at Room 101 of Villa Rosa Sasazuka where Nord lived.

"How many hours have you been waiting?"

"Eh? N-No, it's not like that, I made arrangements to go to your father's place, and while buying some things on the way, I coincidentally…"

“Your nose is really red. And the supermarket name on that bag is further than Sasazuka Station.”

“Ah…!”

Lailah covered her nose on reflex.

“The weather’s so cold, you could have just waited in Father’s room.”

“B-But I won’t be able to talk to you alone like that…”

Luckily, Lailah was just a mother who did not know how to interact with her daughter who she had not seen for many years, otherwise these actions were just like a stalker’s.

“…I’ll carry that.”

“Eh? Ah!”

Emi sighed lightly, and took the supermarket plastic bag from Lailah’s hands.

“E-Emilia, that’s heavy…”

“I have gone out with Bell and Ashiya to buy things, this much is nothing.”

After saying this, Emi started to walk without waiting for Lailah to reply.

Lailah got a shock, but immediately came to her senses, following her daughter frantically, and then she walked up next to her in a rather timid manner.

During this time, because Emi sensed that Lailah wanted to talk to her but did not dare to begin, she spoke first, “You didn’t make a mess of the room after that, did you?”

“Eh? Y-Yeah, I do clean up properly! It’s not messy yet!”

“Please don’t end up like that anymore.”

Emi smirked a little, but immediately regained her stern expression.

She was still unable to laugh honestly in front of Lailah.

Some time earlier, Emi and the others had gone to Lailah’s room to understand how Lailah lived in Japan, and saw a room which was so messy that it could no longer be called a room, and once the popular cleaning robots entered the porch, they would be in such despair that they would just turn around and jump off the public corridor.

In front of Maou and the others, Emi entered the room and started to clean it, and although she had stayed there for the entire day, she had just been cleaning.

During the cleaning, only Lailah and Nord would talk normally.

Emi and Lailah did not know what to say to each other, and in the end, other than sorting out the items scattered around the room, the two of them did not talk at all.

Even so, compared to the relationship the two of them had before, this was already a huge improvement, and in reality, the distance between them had decreased to the point that they could walk together like this.

“Is your work busy?”

“Everywhere is shorthanded at the end of the year. But my work does not involve human life where every minute matters, so it’s nothing much.”

“I-I see. That’s good.”

Emi did not say that she was not busy, so it was unclear which part of it was good, but even so, the two of them did converse.

The two of them continued conversing clumsily like this, and when they reached Sasazuka Station, Emi subconsciously stopped walking and stared at the intersection in front of the station and the Shuto Expressway viaduct above it.

“Emilia?”

A few scenes flashed through Emi’s mind — Urushihara attacking the viaduct, Chiho who had almost been flattened, Maou’s and Ashiya’s demon form, fighting with Olba who should have been her important comrade, and Chiho, who still smiled at them even after getting to know their true identities.

“…No, it’s nothing.”

She never thought things would turn out like this.

During this period of almost one year, how many times had she thought of this?

Assuming… Assuming Maou or Emi erased Chiho’s memories, she would probably not be standing here.

After the Demon King fought with Urushihara, Chiho did not show any signs of her memories getting erased. Thinking back on this, Emi started to want to

believe in a possibility which someone who knew the Demon King would not think of.

She had never mentioned this to Emerada and Alberto.

If she had to pull something up, before she became familiar with Chiho, Emi at once mentioned this to Maou in a half-joking manner.

Of course, at that time, she did not think that Maou would accept that suggestion, and in actual fact, Maou had rejected it determinedly.

However, Maou's surroundings now brought that possibility closer to fulfillment.

Emi could not help but think this way.

Ashiya chose to reject. But what about Maou?

"Hey, Lailah."

"What is it?"

"How did you marry Father?"

"Eh?"

This sudden question shocked Lailah.

“How, how did we get married? W-Why did you ask this all of a sudden? E-Erm, m-marrying someone you like is a normal thing to do, isn’t it?”

“……”

Emi had thought this when she heard her father explain how he met Lailah, but the damage caused by a parent’s love story to their child was much more than they had expected.

“I’m not asking about that. You’re an angel who will live for thousands of years, Father is a normal human who will not live beyond a hundred years, why do the two of you still want to be together?”

“Hmm…?”

“The time you have spent together with Father is just a small portion of your life, right?”

“…Ah, that’s what you’re referring to?”

“The two of you will be separated sooner or later, and you will see him leave this world, why do you still…”

“If we did not have such resolve, we would not be together in the first place.”

She was still speaking kindly, but Lailah replied with a rare determined tone.

“It’s true that the time I spent together with that person in Sloan Village is not a rather long period of my life, but it is one of the most important and happiest times in my life.”

“…Why did you choose Father?”

“Why?”

“Father is just a normal human, he does not come from a prestigious family, nor does he have a hero’s lineage. He is unable to help in the war which you plan to ignite, so why did you choose him?”

In some sense, this was the biggest question Emi had when she was thinking about Nord and Lailah’s relationship, but not only was Lailah’s answer simple, it was a little annoying.

“Emilia, have you never fallen in love before?”

“Hahhhhhhh?”

This statement, which was not an answer and filled with a challenging tone, caused Emi’s face and ears to turn red in anger.

However, even when she saw that Emi was angry, not only was Lailah unfazed, she looked towards her daughter’s face in a worried manner, “E-Emilia, are you the type who wants to know about the annual income of your male partner first? Placing importance on career and occupation, wanting to hook some rich guy? Rather than feelings, money and stability are more important?”

“W-W-W-What are you saying!? Why are you suddenly talking about those things!?”

“Y-You’re the one who started this topic first, of course I would think this way. You can’t do that, okay, of course if you pick a partner who looks like he loves gambling and would commit domestic violence, I would ask you to reconsider, but for something like love, you have to first see if your heart is swayed by the other party!”

“Wait a moment! What are you saying!? I…!”

“Weren’t we talking about the reason behind your father and my marriage? Of course it’s because we’re in love, what other reason is there?”

“Wha… you, you said in love… w-what is this? I’m not asking about that…!”

“I have never considered lineage, Sephirah, or battle ability. I fell in love with the man named Nord Justina, this is the only thing which could be considered a reason.”

“T-That’s all?”

“Your father definitely feels the same way.”

“T-That…”

She could not deny it.

Thinking about it carefully, Emi had listened to her father’s passionate romantic history together with Emerada and Suzuno some time back.

Having her friends hear about her father’s love story embarrassed her so much.

“Of course there were many painful experiences after we married. To the people of Sloan, I was a wanderer of unknown origin. Because that person was protecting that piece of land and house by himself after his parents died, I was seen as someone who wanted to scam him. But I worked hard, made an effort to learn the basics of agriculture and animal husbandry, and used my medical knowledge to help the midwives of the village, integrating into

village life little by little. We were unable to live as luxuriously as the nobles, but I would work together with him, occasionally going to the cottage in the mountains for a short vacation, watching the stars together, playing in the river, or reading the books his father left behind, other than that, there were also many other joyous things."

Considering how long Lailah had lived, this was something which happened rather recently, but she sounded as if she was reminiscing about things which had happened a long time ago when she talked about it.

"Your father knew I was an angel from the beginning because of what happened when we met. He knew that he would die earlier than me, but he was still willing to stay with me. We have spoken a lot, and argued, but we stayed together in the end. Other than that, I don't know what else to say."

"B-But…"

"Of course I'll feel sad."

Lailah understood what Emi could not say and replied to her directly, "Your father will become an old man one day, and without changing much in appearance at all, I will watch him leave, however, even after knowing this, I still could not help but like him, just like what I said before, whether your heart is swayed is important!"

"Whether your heart is swayed… that kind of thing."

“Kindness and honesty, these are things difficult to learn even if they have been taught by others. That person had such characteristics from the beginning, which was enough reason for me to like him, and my heart could not help but want to be with your father. Can this be considered an answer?”

“Is this an answer?”

Even Emi who asked this question did not clearly know.

She knew that when an angel who has an exceptionally long lifespan decides to marry a human, they have almost the same mentality as a human, but Emi did not know if this was considered happiness.

Next, Lailah spoke as if she had seen through Emi’s thoughts, “Hey, Emilia, this might be a topic you hate, but I still have to say it.”

“W-What is it?”

“If a person wanted to know whether they were truly happy at a certain point of time, they would only know for sure when looking back on the past. Even happy memories from the past can be painful now. However, if you don’t take action at all because you’re afraid of getting hurt, you definitely won’t obtain happiness. If you don’t take action, you will slip down the slope of misfortune without knowing it, and even if you only get a small scrape each time, your wounds will still increase.”

"……"

"Of course, you might encounter misfortune if you take action, and there will be a lot of situations where you'll get badly injured. But do you think that I, who could only say these words after living for many thousands of years, am unfortunate?"

Emi answered Lailah's question immediately.

"I can't judge that."

"That's right, fortunate or unfortunate, this can only be decided by me. Luckily for me, I feel that marrying your father was a fortunate event, and I don't regret it, I believe your father definitely thinks the same."

"Yeah, at least on this point, I can guarantee it."

"Eh?"

"No, it's nothing… sorry, asking such a strange question."

"It's alright, rather than that, you should ask all you want, ask more!"

“Don’t get ahead of yourself. Father is still waiting for us, let’s return to the apartment quickly.”

Emi gently pushed Lailah away when Lailah wanted to hug her arm, but the light in Lailah’s eyes did not dissipate at all.

“Since you treat that apartment as a place to ‘return’ to, why don’t you just move in?”

“We’ll see.”

Emi, who felt that she had spoken too much with Lailah, forcefully ended the topic and continued walking.

She needed to show the attitude that she did not want to care about Lailah and Gabriel’s plan.

This had nothing to do with the distance between her and Lailah, it was Emi’s own problem.

“Ah, Emilia.”

“What is it?”

“I might have said such things just now, but if possible, Mother hopes that your heart isn’t swayed by that kind of person.”

“That kind of person?”

After looking in the direction Lailah was pointing, Emi could not help but suck in a breath.

Didn’t that back belong to Urushihara?

“Erm, Lucifer turning out like this, I have to bear some responsibility for it too, but after hearing about his life in Japan from Satan, Alsiel, and Chiho-san, Mother honestly cannot accept that kind of person…”

“What you said isn’t funny on a lot of levels, and the scene in front of us could not get any more serious. That guy is actually wandering around outside without a guardian!”

“Ah, Emilia!”

It was just Urushihara walking on the streets alone, but it was enough for Emi to feel an indescribable sense of uneasiness. She frantically chased after Urushihara’s back, and Lailah followed after Emilia with a slight run, then on the way to the apartment, Lailah and Emi—

“Whether it is Bell, Sasaki Chiho, or you, stop this already! I already said that I am many times older than you people! I’m going to get angry!”

—were forced to listen to Urushihara’s protests.

※

A few hours after Emi and Lailah returned to Villa Rosa Sasazuka while listening to Urushihara complain, the skies darkened further.

Once the chaotic dinner period passed, a noisy person rushed into the MgRonalds in front of Hatagaya Station.

“It’s time for dinner!”

Obviously, that person was the Shop Manager for the Sentucky Fried Chicken Hatagaya store, Sarue Mitsuki, whose true identity was archangel Sariel. He had come to Kisaki’s store to contribute, within a reasonable amount, to its business profits.

“The arousal in my heart, which resounds more than the clock announcing Christmas Eve, burns with love tonight as well! Tonight, I, Sariel………………… how regretful, the goddess isn’t here today as well.”

““W-Welcome.””

Recently, using some unknown supernatural sensory organ, Sariel could judge if Kisaki was around within a few seconds of entering the store.

In the past, when Sariel came to the store, most of the employees, with a stiff smile, would push the work of serving him to Maou, but after half a year, everyone was mostly used to it. Despite feeling a little perplexed, they would serve him the same way as any other customer.

However, the customers were unable to act the same.

In principle, Sariel, nicknamed “one person flash mob,” would only come thirty minutes after the morning, afternoon, and evening peak periods. Therefore, there were still some people amongst their regular customers who had never seen him.

If it was their first time seeing him, some may even drop their cups in fright.

Then, an unfortunate event happened. A certain man, who was seeing Sariel's abnormal actions for the first time, dropped his newly bought Smartphone in fright.

“Oh, oh no.”

He picked up the phone he dropped and frantically checked if there was any obvious damage to its exterior, but the man’s voice and actions caught Sariel’s attention.

“Oh? It’s rare to see you here.”

“……”

After spotting Ashiya Shiro, Sariel walked towards him with a look of surprise.

“Why are you eating by yourself during this time? Al… no, uh, let me think, Ashiya, it’s Ashiya, right?”

Sariel, who normally did not interact with Maou and the others, took some time to remember Alsiel’s name in Japan.

“I heard Maou mention it before, but I never thought that you were actually doing this kind of thing.”

As for Ashiya, he turned back to face Sariel in an exasperated manner.

“What do you mean?”

However, Sariel acted as if he did not know what he was doing wrong.

“That, how should I say it? That would be reading love letters to Shop Manager Kisaki in a loud volume, troubling others every time…”

“Calling it a love letter is rude, I convert my overflowing passion directly into words every time. Preparing lines in advance would not touch anyone’s heart.”

He did not know how serious Sariel was about it, but if all of it was the truth, Ashiya could only feel awed by those lines which Sariel referred to as passion.

“Regardless, Shop Manager Kisaki and Maou are not around today.”

“I know. As long as Shop Manager Kisaki is not around, the store’s atmosphere, lighting, sounds, smell, and everything else are different.”

What did Sariel see and sense?

“Hm? Wait a moment. Did you just say that Shop Manager Kisaki as well as Maou, are not in the store?”

“T-That’s right.”

“What does that mean? Why are the two of them not around? Maou is a Shift Manager, right? The Shop Manager and Shift Manager actually leaving the store at the same time, did someone from the upper management come?”

“It’s not like that. Because Maou is applying for the full-timer promotion training, he left the store for the day with Shop Manager Kisaki.”

Ashiya, who had never seen Sariel’s strange behavior, did not know how careless his words were.

In front of Ashiya, Sariel’s expression turned more and more frail, and his eyes were filled with a murderous intent.

“Only Maou and Shop Manager Kisaki, the two of them?”

“W-Wait, what are you thinking, it is just the two of them, but it is for work related matters.”

“Full-timer promotion training? My goddess went with the Demon King to participate in that?”

“Uh, erm, I don’t know whether Shop Manager Kisaki is with him the whole time.”

“…Ugh.”

Sariel produced a hell ogre-like groan from deep within his throat, then suddenly turned towards the counter, walking in that direction with large strides.

Kawada could not help but flinch because of the other party's aura, but he still summoned his voice with all his might to serve the customer—

"W-Wel…"

"I want to work at this store too!"

"...comee?"

—yet Sariel's overly shocking request called Kawada to let out a shrill voice.

"You're still hiring employees right, I want to apply, hurry and arrange for an interview, I'm going to immediately write my resume later."

"Er, er, er, er, erm, Shop Manager Sarue? What are you saying?"

"Kawada, is your comprehension ability so poor that you can't understand such a simple thing?"

Sariel, who visited the MgRonalds in front to Hatagaya Station the most as a customer, had already memorized the names of all the main employees.

“You just have to tell Shop Manager Kisaki about me applying for the job today, someone will then naturally contact me about the interview date.”

“Uh, er, erm, ehhh? No, no matter what…”

Despite it being Kawada, he became speechless when faced with this ridiculous situation, the shop manager from another company in the same industry suddenly running over and wanting to apply to work here, it would be difficult not to feel flustered.

“A-Anyway, Shop Manager Sarue, please calm down! I will tell Kisaki that you have come by!”

“Wouldn’t that be the same as usual? I wanted to apply to be an employee… ugh?”

“What idiotic things are you saying?”

Ashiya, who could not continue watching this scene, stepped forward to stop Sarue.

“What are you doing, let go of me! I’m serious about it!”

“That’s even worse! Erm, I will deal with this man. I’m sorry, please help clean up the table I just used…”

“Ah, al, alright, I will clean it up.”

“Many thanks. Hey, we’re going.”

“Let, let go of me! Let go! What do you want!? This has nothing to do with you, right!?”

“If I did nothing despite being present, I would be unable to face my master later. I stayed here for the sake of handling this kind of situation!”

Kawada could only stare in a dazed manner as the male customer taller than himself left while carrying away Sarue who was about Chiho’s height.

“Kawacchi, you’ve worked hard.”

Ooki Akiko, with her heart filled with pity, patted Kawada’s back lightly from behind.

“Aki-chan… what happened just now?”

“I don’t really know either, but this means that this store still needs Kisaki-san or Maou-san to be around. This world has all kinds of people after all.”

“When I think about how I might encounter this kind of thing in the future, I start to worry whether I have the ability to inherit my family business.”

“This kind of thing will not happen so easily.”

“I wonder if Shop Manager Sarue became like this because the reservations for the fried chicken buckets for Christmas are too low?”[2]

“It seems like full time employees accumulate stress easily, I’m starting to worry if I can find a job.”

For a long while after that, Kawada and Akiko were unable to shift their gaze away from the automatic door the tall and short customers passed through.

“Damn it, let go of me! It’s about time you let go of me! I’m going to call someone!”

“We’re already standing out a lot. Listen well, if you return to the store and say those idiotic things, I will report this to Shop Manager Kisaki through Demon King-sama.”

“I understand! I understand already! Let go of me first!”

It was already ten thirty pm, but there were still many people around Hatagaya.

Amongst those people, Ashiya carrying Sariel attracted many gazes.

Sariel also finally calmed down, and after getting put down by Ashiya, he glared at Ashiya unhappily, but he only straightened out his clothes and showed no signs of wanting to run back to MgRonalds.

“I’m at fault as well, for momentarily losing my reason.”

“Then what happened before that wasn’t you losing your reason?”

Sariel ignored the surprised Ashiya and complained in a low voice, “Hmph, damn Demon King. Actually spending time alone with my goddess for the full-timer promotion training, how detestable. No, I heard that the Demon King has been very fixated on becoming a full-time employee for unknown reasons, could it be that he’s had his sights on my goddess since the beginning?”

“Wait a moment, I will not allow you to randomly speculate on Demon King-sama’s thoughts, and how can you confirm that there is no one else with them?”

“You’re the one who doesn’t understand the situation,” Sariel said scornfully. “It’s not that easy to add one more full-time employee at this time. If a non-full time employee wants to convert to a full-time employee, a nomination from the supervising manager is needed, else they might not even have the opportunity to participate in the training. At least in Sentucky, if a full-time employee is to be hired, the immediate supervisor has to take on the responsibility of being their training partner, personally guiding the employee for the training… personally guiding… damn it, you stinky Demon Kinggggggg!”



Sariel became angry at what he said, but coming from a full-time employee from Sentucky, what he said was unexpectedly convincing.

But as Demon King Satan’s trusted follower, Ashiya could not stay quiet about this.

“Let me say this first, Demon King-sama and Shop Manager Kisaki will not develop the male-female relationship which you have imagined.”

“This kind of thing, no one can confirm this, right!?”

However, in a blunt manner, the archangel rebuked the Demon General’s explanation.

“Regardless of how small the chances are, nobody knows what can cause the relationship between a man and a woman to deepen! To Shop Manager Kisaki, the Demon King is her trusted subordinate, a man she trusts enough to reveal her dreams to! In addition, they share the same hardships at work! There is nothing else which would make me feel more uneasy than this!”

“Is, is that so?”

Sariel’s reasons for worry were more realistic than expected, shocking Ashiya a little.

Ashiya had only obtained some fragments of information about Sariel's personality through Maou, Chiho, Emi, and Suzuno, so he had thought that Sariel was an unrealistic and frivolous person.

"I have wanted to ask this since some time ago."

"What is it!?"

"What kind of relationship do you want to build up with Shop Manager Kisaki?"

"Hmm…"

Ashiya's question caused Sariel's gaze to change.

"This is really a difficult question."

"Hmm?"

"Considering our respective environments, it would probably be better for me to marry into Kisaki's family."

"…Hmm?"

“I am not so optimistic to think that my current self has a chance. The question now is not whether I am willing to take Shop Manager Kisaki as my wife, but if she plans to take me as her husband.”

“……Hmmmm? Wait, wait a minute.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Your premise is too strange.”

“Which part of it is strange? If marriage was not the premise, I would not carry out those courting actions.”

“Your actions were under the premise of marriage?”

Ashiya could not help but feel shocked.

“I don’t know of any other methods.”

“Uh, erm, it’s not about the method. Before that, do you plan to marry a human?”

“Is there anything strange about that?”

Even if he was asked if there was anything strange about it, Ashiya could only say that Sariel's existence and actions were very strange, but it was meaningless to say this now.

"Don't angels live much longer than humans?"

"Yeah, and so? Is that what you wanted to say? Two people with vastly differing lifespans would not be happy even if they are together?"

After Sariel said this, without waiting for Ashiya to reply, he continued to speak as he shrugged, "I had thought you wanted to say something else, but fortune and misfortune can only be decided by the parties involved, right? Love affected by the opinions of others isn't considered love in the first place."

"The parties you're talking about currently don't include Shop Manager Kisaki, you know?"

Ashiya finally could not hold it in and said this, but Sariel replied once again in a mocking manner, "I heard that you were an intelligent demon conferred the title of Chisho, I never expected that you would be this ignorant."

"What did you say!?"

"The only one who will feel super happy when together with Shop Manager Kisaki is me of course."

“W-What?”

“Even if I spend my whole life on this, I cannot confirm whether Shop Manager Kisaki feels happy or not when she’s with me.”

“W-Wait, what are you saying?”

“This thing called happiness can only be felt by the person themself. Although I have to work hard to make the other party happy, whether my efforts make Shop Manager Kisaki happy, only she can decide that. I am not Shop Manager Kisaki, even if I have a lifespan close to eternity, I definitely cannot treat the true happiness she feels as my own feelings of happiness.”

Ashiya was already so surprised that he became speechless.

The way Sariel spoke sounded like it did not matter what the other party felt as long as he felt that it was good, but in reality, it was the complete opposite.

“You should have lived close to a thousand years. In your life which is not considered short, have you encountered anything which would be seen as fortunate no matter whose point of view it is? I can confirm that, in my life so far, I have never encountered anything like that. Even so, happiness to me is working continuously to chase after that unknown absolute happiness. And that happiness has now come to my side, and exists in the real world!”

After Sariel announced this loudly, he pointed towards the MgRonalds in front of Hatagaya Station which was located close by.

“Especially that happiness, there is already a precedent!”

“Precedent… are you referring to?”

“That’s right! Emilia’s existence is a form of happiness born from a human and angel overcoming the barriers of time! After her existence was revealed, Heaven received a shakeup. I, who encountered Shop Manager Kisaki, strongly believe that shakeup was a cry of life meant to cause Heaven and us angels to break away from the ten thousand year long stagnation!”

Sariel raised both his arms up high and let out a shout, but although the people who passed by intentionally circled around him, Ashiya, as if he was pinned to the spot, could not move at all.

“Alsiel. You have heard Gabriel’s plan too, right?”

“…You…”

“I only learned of it recently as well. If I knew this in the past, together with Raguel, we would have given him the Falling judgement. After all, the me at that time still did not know of the goddess who had descended to Earth, Kisaki Mayumi. In the past, I believed that for Heaven to continue existing, the guidance by the beautiful Ignora was necessary… but it’s different now.”

Sariel finally lowered his arms and ran his hand through his long hair.

"As long as there is the land, the sky, oceans, and organisms which can think and move like myself, humans can advance. I figured out that the person who is stopping this is myself. If Ignora, who is pursuing an ideal colony, saw this Earth or this world called Japan, she would definitely judge it a disorderly, dirty, and immature world. However, instead of a boring sterile room, I would prefer to continue walking in this disorderly world with the people from colorful worlds who have shown me many colors I have not known before… Ah, if they are those white angels working in the hospital, I would welcome them anytime."

If the last sentence was not there, what had been said would have been very cool. For that part, the only thing which could be said was "As expected of Sariel."

Then, at this moment—

"What are you doing, pestering people on the street?"

Unfortunately, suddenly encountering Kisaki Mayumi, who was wearing a suit, at the wrong time, this was also Sariel's style.

"Ah… S-Shop Manager Kisaki, things aren't what you think they are."

Sariel only turned his neck to look back, and froze on the spot in a strange posture.

Kisaki was carrying a shoulder bag which Ashiya had seen before, containing so many files that it could not be closed, and the neatly designed thick coat made her look like a capable businesswoman. This attire helped to increase the strength of her gaze which looked like it was going to pierce through Sariel.

“Why are you talking about white angels working in the hospital while standing in the streets, exposing your own hobbies?”

“N-No, erm, I was discussing a philosophical topic of what exactly is happiness with this man here……”

Sariel, who became weak at the knees, looked like he was going to fall over at any time.

“Ah, uh, I…”

This was not exactly wrong, but Kisaki was Maou’s superior, and not wanting to make her angry, Ashiya subconsciously shrunk back in fear.

“Ah, you’re Ashiya-san, right? I’m sorry, someone from our shopping street caused trouble for you.”

“I-It’s not like that, erm, I was really talking with Shop Manager Sarue.”

“There’s no need for you to protect this person. If he really did something, I will report it to the chairman of the shopping street and the police station immediately, so what trouble did this man cause you?”

“Nothing! It’s really nothing! Erm, rather than that! I heard that Maou is working with Shop Manager Kisaki today!”

“Hm? Ah, you came to fetch him?”

Because Ashiya forcefully changed the topic, Kisaki looked at Sariel suspiciously, then replied according to Ashiya’s topic, “I’m sorry that you made a wasted trip, I bid goodbye to him on the train just now, he seems to be going straight home today. Oh yes, I forgot to tell him something today, please help me remind him to buy a new pencil case, that plastic pencil case which is so worn out that it has holes might give others a bad impression during the training.”

“I-I understand, I will let him know.”

“I’ll leave it to you then… hey, Sarue, I still have some things to ask you, you should be willing to accept such an honor, right?”

“Of course, you can ask anything!”

It was obvious that a lecture more punishing than sitting on a pincushion was coming, but Sariel, who had been completely frozen just now, immediately showed a joyful expression, his tail wagging.

“T-Then I’ll take my leave first.”

Once he noticed that Kisaki was focused on Sariel, Ashiya bowed immediately and prepared to leave, but at this moment, Sariel shouted from behind, “Oh yeah, Ashiya! Help me pass this message to your roommate! The offer from before is still valid, so ask him to freely choose how to live his life!”

“Eh? O-Okay…”

Ashiya, who was unable to show a bad attitude in front of Kisaki, felt perplexed by this strange message—

“Don’t guide the lives of other people so carelessly. No matter what, you’ll only lead people astray.”

And Sariel, despite being hit on the back of the head by an annoyed Kisaki, still looked very happy.

Actually, Ashiya had planned to sit at MgRonalds until it closed, but since he had received concrete information that Maou had already gone home, it was meaningless to stay there.

Maou’s social circle was centered around the MgRonalds in front of Hatagaya Station, and the reason Ashiya stayed there was to guard against unknown threats.

“But Demon King-sama should have sent me a message before going home, then I could have returned home earlier to prepare supper for him… ah.”

When he could no longer hear Kisaki’s and Sariel’s voices, Ashiya mumbled to himself while checking his phone, and noticed that there was a ① symbol on the top right corner of the message icon.

“……”

The message was received fifteen minutes ago. When Ashiya opened it up, he realized that it was a message sent by Maou, and its contents were that he was reaching home very soon. Ashiya frowned and said, “It’s because of Sariel that I did not notice the vibration in silent mode. I think that the way to change the vibration mode was…”

Ashiya stood on the spot and stared at the screen for a while—

“……”

But the phone screen still mercilessly turned dark in front of Ashiya, who froze with a perplexed expression on his face.

After exceeding the standby time, it went into sleep mode.

“I wanted to set the standby timer to be slightly longer too…”

Ashiya felt that he saw the cheerful smile of a certain lady on the other side of the phone screen which had turned dark, then, without doing anything, he put the phone into the pocket of his pants.

“What am I doing?”

After that, he had not contacted Suzuki Rika.

However, every time he saw Rika’s name shown at the very top of the phone book with less than twenty people recorded, an emotion he had never felt before would circle within his heart.

“…I have to go back quickly. Demon King-sama should have reached home.”

Ashiya stuck his frozen hands into his pocket and quickly walked back to the apartment. But before reaching the room, Ashiya kept getting the feeling that Sariel’s words were chasing after him, and he could not calm down at all.

※

That day a few weeks ago, when the distance between Emi and Lailah shortened a little.

After escaping from Lailah's room that caused others despair, Chiho and the others asked Gabriel a question in the Moz Burger at Nerima Station, and did not get an immediate answer.

"Do all of you know about Nauru?"

Everyone felt that it was a foreign term.

Because this was said by Gabriel, Chiho thought that it should be a term related to Ente Isla or Heaven—

"Sasaki Chiho, you haven't heard of it?"

But for unknown reasons, Gabriel called upon Chiho, someone from Earth.

"Eh? Eh? Me?"

"Yeah, to be exact, of those present, only you or Ama nee-san would possibly know about it."

“That means~~ this term refers to something on Earth~~?”

Gabriel lightly nodded in response to Emerada’s query—

“So it does not refer to those parasites living in the lake and marsh areas in the northeast region of the Northern Continent~~ which rapidly replicate within the bodies of the cows which accidentally drink the water there~~ and devour their hosts until there’s nothing left, right~~?”

—then after hearing the next question asked by her, his face immediately turned stiff from fright and he replied, “What’s that, I don’t know about terrifying creatures like that.”

Just as everyone was thinking *Does such a creature even exist*? Gabriel finally revealed the answer, “A-Anyway, Nauru is the name of a country on Earth. It is a small island nation only larger than the Vatican City and Monaco, located near the Equatorial Pacific Ocean. It is considered part of the Micronesian Islands, but it is located far away from the other islands. Because it has a small population, it is dependent on Australia for its national defence and economy. During the war, the Japanese seemed to have built an airport there.”

As everyone listened, it sounded more and more like a nation located on Earth.

Though Chiho heard this much, she still had no impression of the country of Nauru, but from a few keywords, she deduced that it should be an island nation with a warm climate and beautiful seas.

However, how was this country of Nauru related to Heaven?

Gabriel ignored everyone's question and continued to speak, "During the 20th century, this country was known as Heaven on Earth. Firstly, no citizens had to pay taxes."

"Eh?"

Chiho got a shock, Suzuno and Emi's eyes also widened in surprise.

"Not only that, every citizen could obtain a basic income with no conditions attached. In other words, for all citizens across all age groups, the nation would provide them with the funds needed for their daily needs on an annual basis. This is different from the citizen pension which Japan currently gives to the elderly from low income households, okay? From infants to the elderly, they are able to get an amount such that there will be money left over even after eating out for all three meals every day and changing cars every year, they can get this money without working, and I will say this again, they don't have to pay taxes."

"Is, is this true?"

This was an environment which greatly exceeded Chiho's level of understanding, but Gabriel nodded very seriously.

"Yeah, it's normal for you to react like this. But all of this is true. There aren't many people with Nauru citizenship, but their per capita income at that time was the highest in the world, much higher than Japan and America. They did not have anyone who could be considered super wealthy, but all the nation's citizens used to be equally affluent. Even when measuring against global standards, this was an undeniable fact."

As if Chiho was listening to a story about a foreign world, she was shocked speechless.

Talking about foreign worlds, why did Gabriel, an angel from a foreign world, know about this country which was unknown by the Japanese on Earth? Feeling bothered by this, after Chiho calmed down from the shock she received at the beginning, she immediately noticed one thing.

"Used to?"

"Yeah."

"…Then how about now?"

As if Gabriel was waiting for that question, he answered with a huge smile, "The national unemployment rate is more than ninety percent, it's one of the

poorest countries in the world. Currently, they are receiving assistance from various places around the world via diplomatic relations so they can barely survive.”

“H-How did it turn out like this?”

Chiho, who lacked knowledge about politics and the economy, was unable to imagine what happened to cause the paradise on Earth to end up in such a predicament.

However, Emerada, who was born into the world of politics, immediately saw through the underlying reason.

“That country~~ did it use to have some natural resource which the whole world needed~~? Then because that resource dried up later~~ they became like this now~~?”

“That’s right, that country used to be a place rich in phosphate.”

Whether as an industrial raw material in manufacturing or as an agricultural resource, phosphate was necessary.

Since the manufacturing and agricultural industries needed it, that meant the whole world needed it.

Within the small land of Nauru was the largest deposit of phosphate in the world, formed from seagull feces accumulated over tens of thousands of years.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the large nations which required phosphate flooded into Nauru one after another, and the local leaders kept changing over time based on the current situation.

Nauru became an independent republic after World War II and joined the Commonwealth of Nations, and after that, slowly became the paradise as described by Gabriel, but during the 1990s, all signs of the paradise disappeared without a trace.

"In a short period of less than ten years, from a paradise, they collapsed to become the poorest nation in the world. A prosperous land, famous for being an export nation with rich natural resources, collapsed in just ten years. However, to completely deplete something accumulated over tens of thousands of years in less than a hundred years, humans are really scary."

Gabriel spoke as he prepared to take another fry, but after realizing that the fries had all been eaten, he shrugged in a self-mocking manner and spoke, "However, the decline is something which could not have been avoided. After the phosphate depleted, businesses from around the world and laborers who had left their home countries to work there also started to leave, Nauru became poorer and poorer like this, and of course, the basic income policy with no strings attached could not be maintained any further. If they had no

money, they couldn't even buy food. So Sasaki Chiho, if it was you, what would you do at this time?"

Chiho had the illusion that she was in a history or civics class in school, but she still tried her best to think within the scope of her limited knowledge.

"I would probably look for a job, but since that place seemed to be going through a Great Depression, there wouldn't be any job opportunities within the country. If so, if they want to secure their food sources, they can still barely maintain it with agriculture or fishing industries, or go overseas to look for jobs…"

The black and white movies of the American Great Depression and the topics in the textbooks Chiho had watched and read in class surfaced in her mind.

"Splendid answer. If it was that guy who called himself First Rate, he would probably just give up and starve to death."

Everyone present intentionally avoided thinking about who Gabriel was referring to when he said First Rate.

"That is the normal reaction. No one wants to starve, if they feel that the money is going to be used up, normal people will start to use it sparingly or look for a job."

Gabriel continued to speak with a self-mocking smile, “But, unexpectedly, most of the Nauru citizens did nothing.”

“Eh?”

“It’s not that they couldn’t do anything, but they didn’t do anything. Other than the people who had continuously worked in the primary industries since a very long time ago, the other citizens only silently watched as the industries collapsed and their nation’s economy became bankrupt.”

“D-Did nothing, how can this be?”

“The phrase ‘He who does not work shall not eat’ can only exist if there were people before this who worked to get food.”

At this moment, Amane, who would occasionally tease Acies and Iron, but was now starting to worry that the two of them were sucking her wallet dry at a terrifying rate, joined in the conversation.

“The period of time in which the Nauru citizens did not need to work was too long. In the era which they depended on the phosphate industry to prosper, most of the people with jobs in the country were laborers from overseas who went there to work, and before the proliferation of the phosphate industry, the indigenous people lived on by fishing or farming on the small land. Because most of it was self-sufficient or through barter trade, no monetary economy

existed. Therefore, no matter which era it was, the thought of ‘working to get money’ did not exist.”

Because even the fishing industry operated on self-sufficiency, this kind of industry would not be filled with energy.

When mining for the phosphate, the whole island was covered in pits and holes, and even the backyards of their own homes did not escape harm, so the agriculture industry which existed before the development of the phosphate industry faced many challenges even if it was just for self-sufficiency.

However, the concept of working to get money did not seep into the lives of the Nauru citizens who were able to live on without working for the past few generations.

Of course, not every citizen was without a job, the transportation, communications, and businesses there were still functioning as normal, and as long as they were willing to put in effort, tourism could still be developed, and even the declining phosphate industry was still actively looking for new sources of phosphate.

The politicians who had been trained overseas also wanted to revive the economy via the real estate and financial industries.

Luckily, the citizens there had a mild temperament, so no riots happened despite the economic collapse, and the already small population did not decline rapidly as well.

But the biggest problem was that the citizens' will to work was abnormally low, and the eating habits during the abundant era and the unique idea of beauty in the South Pacific where 'fat is beauty' led to the constant worsening of the obesity rate and number of people with diabetes.

The economic policies which were implemented failed constantly, and rather than preventing the decline, they were even speeding up the decline.

In the end, in exchange for international aid, they started to accept refugees, but even the refugees complained that "it was impossible to stay in this kind of country."

In current times, where the paradise dream which lasted for a hundred years had dissipated, even if they wanted to revert to the peaceful island nation unique to the South Pacific, it would take a very long time to do so.

Chiho was unable to hide her surprise after learning that such a country actually existed in this world, but after hearing this much, she still could not understand how this topic was related to the current state of Heaven.

“Haah, I have never seen all this with my own eyes, I read a lot of information about this world in the internet café I was staying at, and this is just part of it.”

Chiho never expected that this random topic was information obtained by an angel from a foreign world using the internet, but Gabriel’s expression was unexpectedly serious as he said these things.

“Actually, the current situation in Heaven just happens to be the same as Nauru’s when they were about to decline. Most of the angels are lacking nothing in their lives. However, including Ignora and us Guardian Angels, also known as the top brass, we all know that we cannot continue to be satisfied with this kind of life, but no one wants to change this situation, no one is willing to act for the sake of this.”

Gabriel’s gaze shifted from Chiho to Suzuno.

“Let me ask you this, what is the final goal of the believers of God? What do you expect when you pray to God?”

“We hope God will provide salvation, and in the end, reach a Paradise where there is no suffering. Something like that.”

Suzuno, who still saw herself as a Cleric, replied in this way.

“In reality, we do not think that such a world truly exists somewhere, and we do not think that it is enough just to reach that place. A world where everyone works hard to realize such a belief is the Paradise described in the Bible. The main branch of Saint Ignord is currently using this kind of theory.”

“Yeah. If a Paradise with no suffering truly existed, then what would happen to humans?”

“They would either fall to extreme depravity, or have a very low level of emotion and code of ethics, no matter what, the human society we know of would probably collapse.”

“Correct answer!”

Gabriel clapped his hands in a pretentious manner and Amane nodded in agreement.

“Ignora created that kind of Paradise and is still ruling that place.”

“What does that mean~~?”

In a rare moment, Gabriel acted as if he was carefully choosing his words, and answered Emerada’s question.

“After obtaining a body which will not die as long as they are not put to death, humans are no longer humans, becoming something which is only living.”

After Gabriel said this, he used his right hand to draw a line across his neck, signifying the action of a beheading.

“Angels are immortal existences, but that immortality only means that they will not die naturally, if their head gets cut off, or they lose a huge amount of blood which a transfusion cannot replenish, they will still die. However, the basic theories of spells have found that even if the heart is damaged, as long as there is enough holy magic in the body to repair the heart, there is still a possibility of revival. Haah, I don’t know if there are any after-effects, but there is still a possibility that we can be saved after receiving a wound which is fatal to a human. In addition, the capacity of holy magic is directly proportional to the strength of the body. So, regardless of the reason, we basically do not get the flu, and we do not get sick.”

“Ah, I’ve heard of this before.”

Chiho recalled the contents of the teachings passed on by Suzuno in the bath house before she had successfully learned Idea Link. She looked towards Suzuno, and they nodded at each other.

“Yeah, on the other hand, because us angels can currently store a huge amount of holy magic, we have obtained a body which will not die as time

passes. Even if we do not eat, or live for a few thousand years, we will not die from reasons related to metabolism, growth, or illness. Humans which will not die as long as they are not killed, staying in an absolutely safe shelter, living a life where nothing is lacking, this is the current Heaven."

They can continue to live on even if they do nothing.

This was the same as Nauru when they could continue to obtain the money they needed to maintain their lives as long as they were alive.

"Thanks to that, the people of my home… the inhabitants of Heaven, wasted away. That place used to be no different from Earth or Ente Isla, a place where humans with normal bodies gathered. But after the overlapping of misfortune, coincidence, and Ignora's power, we were bestowed with the title of angel and lost our identities as humans. This is to be expected, because we did not have any reason to live. After obtaining immortality, we were not required to do anything. Having spent too long in this state, we have already forgotten how to live with a purpose."

Just like Nauru's citizens who, for a few generations, could get money without having to work, the citizens of Heaven, no, Gabriel's home, had fallen into a similar situation.

"Please think back, those angels who have appeared in front of all of you so far, how many of them have you encountered in total?"

“Uh…”

Chiho and Suzuno looked at each other once more, and started to count with their fingers.

“Sariel-san, Gabriel-san, Lailah-san…”

“Raguel, Kamael, and those from the Heavenly Troops, and in this situation, Emilia and Lucifer should also be considered angels?”

“Don’t you feel that this is too small? We are still alien-like highly intelligent beings who have been controlling the history of Ente Isla from the shadows, you know? However, the numbers are this low. Do you know how many demons the Demon King mobilized when he attacked Ente Isla?”

“Even if we are only considering the final clean up battle in the Central Continent, there must have been more than fifty thousand troops…”

Suzuno said this as she looked at Maou’s side profile.

Maou did not react much, and did not rebuke either, so it must have been the correct answer.

On the flip side, it could be said that several times that number of demons had been exterminated by the humans of Ente Isla, but even if Maou felt that

he had to take responsibility for this, he would not hate humans because of this; Suzuno knew this better than anyone.

However, just as everyone remembered the numbers left of the Demon King Army at the end of their invasion, Gabriel immediately said something shocking.

“The total population in Heaven right now is less than five thousand. Among them, more than ninety percent of the people just sit around and do nothing. Besides living, they do nothing else.”

“Only… five thousand people?”

Whether as a species or for forming a society, this number was too small.

Faced with Chiho’s question, asked in a raspy voice, Gabriel nodded nonchalantly.

“The technology of our planet is more advanced than Earth’s current level, and our spell civilization is more developed than Ente Isla. However, the reason why we are posing as angels in Ente Isla, is because our planet was destroyed.”

Gabriel threw out the term “destroyed” very bluntly, causing Chiho, Suzuno, and Emerada to freeze.

Because Lailah had told Maou and Emi before that she hoped that the two of them could save the Ente Isla humans from the crisis.

"That was really just a result of the accumulation of many misfortunes."

Gabriel rested his chin on his hands, and sighed lightly.

"During the period of time when the activity of the star in the center of our solar system was low, a large scale supernova explosion occurred in the nearby Milky Way. The damage caused by this incident only caused the telecommunication systems to shut down globally for one or two days, this was not the problem. Perhaps the currents of space had changed, the pressure of the supernova explosion brought over terrifying, harmful substances from an unknown location, enough to cover our entire planet. The period of time when the activity of the star was low would be around thirty years from Earth's point of view. Anyway, the star system our planet was located in was normally protected by the solar winds of our star, but during the period of time when the solar winds stopped, the pressure caused by the faraway supernova explosion unfortunately brought harmful substances drifting around the nearby extrasolar space to our planet, and for unknown reasons, when our fixed star began to enter its active period, those harmful substances flowed back into the galaxy, just like an unfortunate chain of car accidents. Haah, but this information was only discovered by the scientific team formed by Ignora after things could no longer be salvaged.

"Gab-kun was also one of the researchers at that time?"

Gabriel shook his head in response to Amane’s question.

“No, at that time, I did not know anything about science, medicine, or astronomy,” Gabriel regained his usual frivolous smile and spoke, “When my mother planet was still alive, I was the Head of Security for the research facility managed by Ignora. Our salary was pitifully low compared to the specialized researchers, but we were on very good relations with the people in the research facility. I also became acquainted with many big-shots during that time… ah, I don’t remember the last time I talked about these things. I thought I had forgotten most of it…”

Gabriel suddenly showed a nostalgic expression and watched the people pass by the window as they entered and left Nerima Station.

“Anyway, those harmful substances caused everyone in the world to be hit by endemic diseases with terrifyingly high fatality rates. A good number of countries with weak economies were eradicated. Ignora’s research facility was an organization created to find an effective strategy to counter the harmful substances and the epidemic, hiring various talent from around the world. The research facility was located in an immigrant city on the moon. We had a very long history of space exploration, so whether it was exploring the planets within the star system or having people immigrate over, this was something very natural to us. To protect humans from the dark reaches of the harmful substances and endemic, we began our research in various fields, medicine, astronomy, spells, meteorology, geoscience, urban policy,

construction, genetic engineering, and the development of laws, economic policies, and distribution techniques to which the research results could be applied, anyway, we did everything we could, but…"

Gabriel looked back towards Acies and Iron who had started to snatch Maou's wallet to add on more orders.

"We still failed in the end. We were unable to save the planet and the humans. Our home planet was much more advanced than Earth and Ente Isla, but less than twenty years after the endemics spread across the planet, that advanced human civilization was destroyed. And the reason had to be a war which was started because the whole world fought over Ignora's research results related to 'immortality.' You can't even laugh about this. We never thought humans were that stupid, we felt a lot of despair at that time."

"Does that mean the standards of Paradise had collapsed?"

"Crestia Bell, sadly it was nothing that noble."

Gabriel denied Suzuno's question with a smile.

"Humans could not tolerate the wait. They were only concerned about pursuing a magic which could instantaneously get rid of the sudden calamity. What we should have done was spend a few generations to create an antibody which could resist the endemic diseases, build strictly controlled quarantined shelters in various places around the world, or spend a few hundred years to

create a membrane in the atmosphere which could block out the harmful substances. However, Ignora's talent did not allow us to do so. She skipped the slow process of creating the antibody and went straight to creating a magic known as immortality. And the whole world went after it like a flock of ducks. They no longer cared about anything else, and were unable to wait any longer. The whole world started to say 'Quickly, hand me the ideal body which will no longer fear the endemic.' This is not a collapse of standards, they just brought about their own destruction because they could not tolerate the wait."

"Can I ask a question?"

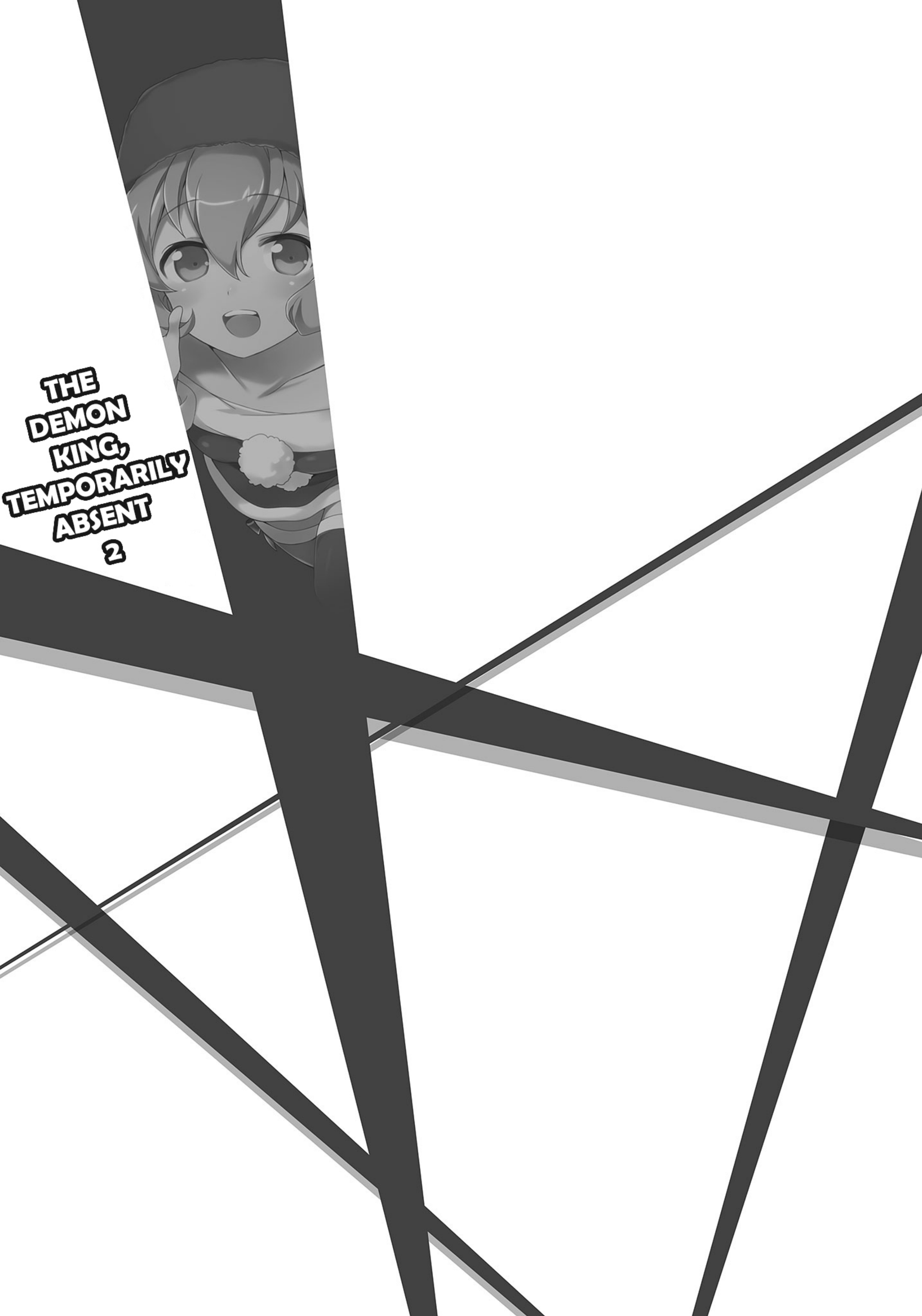
"What is it, Ama nee-san?"

"That immortality research, how was it completed?"

Amane spoke in a stern tone, this was a question asked when she already knew the answer.

Gabriel noticed this as well, and he looked towards Acies who had finally managed to snatch Maou's wallet from him and was running towards the counter.

"Ignora found traces our planet's Tree of Life. And found the Sephirah children hidden amongst the humans."


THE DEMON KING, TEMPORARILY ABSENT 2

Chapter 2: The Demon King, Temporarily Absent 2

The evening of the day after Ashiya was led around in circles by Sariel.

Two young girls with gloomy expressions appeared in the bustling Shinjuku which was covered in Christmas decorations.

“Haah~~”

In this dance hall which was dyed in bright colors from the Christmas commercial war, young or old, everyone started to dance due to the atmosphere, but as if they were an antithesis to the light around them, the two young girls were downcast.

“I’m so depressed~~”

“T-There’s no need to be that down, right?”

No, to be more accurate, they were two females who looked like young girls.

There was a girl in a beret, who dragged out her words as she spoke, the other female, who kept her hair in place with a hair clip, spoke in a stiff tone.

Obviously, they were Emerada Etuva and Kamazuki Suzuno.

“It is not that you cannot come here anymore, you just need to find the time to do so…”

“I can’t do that~~ that’s why I’m depressed… haah~~”

Emerada looked at the Christmas trees within the glass displays in a bitter manner, holding an ice cream cone in her hand. Despite the weather being this cold, she had still gone to a popular ice cream store and queued up to buy Gelato.

“It’s going to become interesting from now on~~ yet I’m going back before getting a chance to see it~~”

Suzuno could only scratch her face and smile in a troubled manner.

Two days ago, Emerada received an anger filled command to return.

The one who sent it was obvious: it was from Alberto who, in Emerada’s place, had stayed behind in the Western Continent of Ente Isla.

As for its contents—

『I’m at my limit. Hurry up and come back. Or else I’m going to cause enough damage that it cannot be patched even with a hundred times the budget, giving Lumark cause to disband the Sorcery Management Institute.』

It was something like that.

Olba’s trial had been causing chaos throughout Ente Isla; Emerada had originally come to report to Emilia about its progress, and then planned to return a few days after that.

However, consecutive incidents of Lailah appearing in Japan and things related to Iron and the Sephirah children happened, and before she realized it, Emerada had already spent more than one month here.

Of course, Emerada continued to keep in contact with Alberto, and until the middle of the stint, Alberto had actively helped because he was concerned about the situation surrounding Emi.

However, it was not apparent if Alberto knew that Emerada had only been playing around the past few days, or if Alberto was truly unable to fill up the hole left when Emerada was not around; his tone had become more and more sinister when he was communicating via Idea Link, and finally, two days ago, he gave Emerada the command to return.

“Haah~~ I really want to eat Christmas cakes~~ and roasted turkey~~”

“W-Why don’t we eat those for lunch today? As long as we find a restaurant which organizes Christmas activities, we should be able to eat them.”

However, Emerada just wanted to enjoy the Japanese customs and culture for Christmas, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day, so she had been complaining the whole time when she was walking on the street.

Even so, for the sake of her responsibilities, she still had to return.

In addition, she needed to prepare return gifts for Alberto and General Heather Lumark, who had stayed in Saint Aire to work.

However, Emi had to work today as well and did not have any free time to spare, so Suzuno became Emerada's guide.

"That kind of thing~~ is only delicious if you eat it on the actual day~~ if you eat it before that day~~ you'll only feel that something is strange~~"

"Is that so?"

In most circumstances, the Christmas meals in Japan had already shifted away from their original significance and became a mere formality, so there did not seem to be any difference in eating it at a certain time, but Emerada wagged her finger as she objected to this.

"Think about it~~ regardless of how delicious it is~~ Ozouni[3] should still be eaten on New Year's Day, right~~?"

“Hm, uh, probably, perhaps it is like that.”

Skipping Christmas and using the later festival as an example, Suzuno would only feel perplexed about this.

Suzuno had not experienced the New Year in Japan, and Emerada should not have known much about it, so despite her raising this example, it did not feel apt.

“Ah~~ but when saying the term ‘Ozouni~~’ it sounds like an Italian or French dish~~ such as Pizza Margherita Ozouni or something~~”

“Yes, I have heard that such combinations have appeared recently. There seem to be some stores which use Italian or French ingredients to make soups resembling Ozouni, you know? But I still like the Japanese-style Ozouni the most.”

“…Bell-san doesn’t know how to play the straight man at all~~”

“Eh?”

Emerada looked at Suzuno in a reproachful manner, giving the latter a huge mental blow.

“But~~ complaining is useless~~ I should just buy some souvenirs and prepare to go back~~”

“Y-Yes…”

While feeling baffled, Suzuno led Emerada into Shinjuku’s Central Plaza.

Emerada then took out a note from her jacket pocket, and began to efficiently decide her destination.

“Firstly~~ I need to buy socks after all~~”

“Socks, is it? Hmm? Socks?”

Suzuno looked at the note and realized that “socks” was written in large handwriting at the top, and Emerada seemed to have planned to buy at least fifty pairs.

“What will you be doing with this many pairs of socks?”

“Eh~~? During this period, aren’t socks necessary for buying souvenirs?”

“Socks are needed for souvenirs?”

“Yeah~~ Christmas is a day where you give presents to people important to you~~ and the present has to be wrapped in a sock~~”

“Emerada-dono, please wait a moment! You seem to have misunderstood something!”

“Eh~~?”

Suzuno secretly breathed a sigh of relief, feeling glad that she had noticed Emerada’s mistake before they began buying things.

“Only Santa Claus would place the present in a sock during Christmas to give it to someone! And only presents given to children are placed inside socks!”

“Ehhhhhh~~!?”

Emerada shouted in surprise, and it was so loud that it caught the attention of the people around them.

“And the place Emerada-dono is heading to next is the UNIxLO at the west exit, right? I think that place… doesn’t sell any socks large enough to contain any presents.”


×50

Suzuno had never seen them before, but the socks which Emerada imagined to be part of a Christmas gift set could only be bought at a general store.

“Did I~~ completely misunderstand it~~?”

“That is right. I do not know whether to call it a misunderstanding or just an incorrect association, but adults do have a practice of exchanging gifts with one another, and the souvenirs bought now will be wrapped in a Christmas-like style, so it should be fine as long as you buy normal Japanese style souvenirs, right?”

“Ugh… uhh~~ this is bad~~”

“Why?”

“I thought that since it’s going to be wrapped in a sock~~ I should buy a present which is more long and narrow~~ so I have already asked Emilia~~ to help me order the wine here via online shopping~~”

“…Uh.”

In front of Emerada who was feeling stunned, Suzuno tried to recall the meaning of online shopping from what little she knew.

“That means that all those wine bottles are not specially packaged?”

“I did not specifically ask for it~~ because I thought it was going to be wrapped inside the sock~~”

“The current season in the Western Continent… ah, it is no good, it is almost Christmas season there as well. With these circumstances, how can Emerada-dono, as a court sorceress, give others wine without packaging it first?”

“T-That’s right~~ so~~ I had planned to wrap it in a sock, following the customs of this place~~”

“Forget about the socks for now. In addition, other than Alberto-dono and General Lumark, there shouldn’t be anyone else who knows about foreign worlds. If someone asks you why you stuffed a wine bottle in a sock, which continent’s culture would you plan to use as an excuse?”

“Ah…”

The expression on Emerada’s face revealed that she really did not think about this.

“Anyway, let’s buy some wrapping paper first, there might be standard boxes for wine bottles.”

“I-I’m depending on you~~”

Seeing Emerada looking so troubled, Suzuno suddenly had a feeling that she had seen other people end up in a situation similar to Emerada's.

As Suzuno was thinking back, she was searching for general stores which sold wrapping paper, and it was only when she saw MgRonalds in the middle of her search did she have a realization.

Emerada's situation just now was herself from half a year ago.

Mistaking the scale and the methods, Suzuno tried to light the welcoming fire for Obon and was harshly scolded by Maou.

"Bell-san~~?"

"Ah, it is nothing, I was just thinking that I have become very capable."

Suzuno did not give Emerada a chop on the head with her hand like what Maou had done to her, but Suzuno felt that she was getting used to Japan at a faster rate than Maou and Emi, and she was not exaggerating this.

Of course, this was because of the help from Maou, Ashiya, Urushihara, Emi, and Chiho. Even so, it had been less than one year since that commotion where she faced against Maou, Emi, and Chiho as a subordinate of Sariel and the Church.

“So Emerada-dono, what kind of presents do you want to buy, and how many people are you giving them to?”

“Uh~~ it’s not for that many people~~”

While they were in the elevator, Suzuno realized that the number of recipients of the presents counted by Emerada was not that high, and most of the souvenirs were actually bought for herself to take home, but with this, it became very easy for Suzuno to give Emerada suggestions.

“You’ve been a huge help~~ I can preserve my reputation with this~~”

In the end, other than the things used for wrapping presents, the two of them had browsed a number of other stores, and the activity which they had planned to finish before noon ended in the evening instead.

The two of them were carrying a large number of shopping bags which they could barely lift, and these were not the only things they had bought, many items would be delivered to Emi’s house later on.

“T-That is great, but, is it alright to give General Lumark this kind of souvenir…”

Emerada, who thanked Suzuno with a huge smile on her face, was currently hugging a huge Rilakkuma plushie won from a machine in an arcade.

“It’s alright~~ she might act that way~~ but she really likes cute things~~”

“T-That is really unexpected.”

Suzuno had never thought that Heather Lumark, who had become the commander of the Saint Aire Knight Troops at a young age and taken on significant responsibility in the Five Continent Knight Alliance which was formed to restore the Central Continent, actually liked cute things, but what surprised her more was that Emerada had only spent 300 yen to win that huge plushie.

“Bell-san~~ probably doesn’t dislike cute things, right~~?”

“Uh, I suppose so, but that does not seem right as well…”

“And~~ if you build a good relationship with important people like this on a regular basis~~ it will be more advantageous for when you’re applying for next year’s budget~~”

When she had the thought that this cute plushie with a very relaxed design was going to be used in a high level political exchange, Suzuno's expression turned blank.

Or, more accurately, doing this much amounted to bribery.

When Suzuno, who used to handle all the dirty jobs of the Church, saw the sleepy eyes of the Rilakkuma, she strongly hoped that beautiful things could remain that way.

"Hmm? This place is?"

At this moment, Suzuno suddenly noticed a familiar building, and looked up to confirm it.

"Ah, Emerada-dono, this is the company Emilia used to work at."

"I see~~!"

Hugging the Rilakkuma, Emerada looked up at the sign on the roof, and "DoCoDeMo" was written on top.

"This means~~ Rika-san works here too~~?"

"Yes, it probably does. I do not know whether she is working today though."

Talking about that, Suzuno had heard that the Slimphone Ashiya started using recently seemed to be connected to Rika.

Unlike the time they had bought the television, only Ashiya and Rika went out together for this.

"…Uh, it is probably impossible, it is that Alsiel and Rika-dono after all."

Suzuno recalled what happened when Maou had discovered Rika's feelings as they were buying the televisions, but as if to dispel her thoughts, she immediately shook her head with force.

Rika looked like she lived an honest and clean life, and the current Rika was different from before; she already knew Ashiya's true identity.

Of course, Rika knew what Ashiya did in Ente Isla, so towards Ashiya, it was probably impossible for her to still…

"Ugh."

Suzuno immediately remembered a person around her who still had a crush on Maou despite knowing their true identities and the truth, causing her to enter a predicament in which she had to deny her own thoughts.

“Bell-san~~”

“Uh, but, I remember Alsiel came home very early that day, and Rika-dono did not come to the apartment after that.”

“Erm~~ Bell-san~~”

“B-But the Demon King seems very busy these days, Alsiel’s and Lucifer’s actions are a little suspicious too, could it be…?”

“Hey, Bell-san~~!”

“Y-Yess? What’s wrong?”

“Look over there~~”

“Hmm?”

“It’s Rika-san~~”

“What?”

Suzuno looked up in surprise, and realized that Rika, who had recognized the two of them, was waving at them from across the street.

Thinking about it carefully, it was not strange for her to get off work at this time.

Meeting her while walking past her company at this time was also very normal.

After noticing that Suzuno and Emerada had noticed her, Rika made a gesture to ask them to wait for a while on their side, then while abiding by the nearby traffic signals, she crossed the road towards them.

Then, as Rika started to cross the road, Suzuno noticed another female following behind her.

Suzuno did not know that person, but it must have been Rika's colleague.

“Suzuno-chan, Emerada-chan, why are the both of you carrying so many things!? It looks like the two of you went on a huge shopping trip.”

From Suzuno's point of view, Rika looked no different from usual once she came to their side.

“Eh? Where's Emi? She's not here today?”

“That's right~~ I actually~~ have to make an emergency trip back~~”

“Eh? Is that so? Uh… erm, you’re going back to your hometown?”

Rika diverted her attention to behind her for a moment, then unnaturally used the term “hometown.”

She was hinting that the female behind her did not know about Emi’s true identity.

“That’s right~~ so I wanted to buy some souvenirs to bring back~~ it’s too bad Emi has to work today~~”

Emerada noticed this, and used “Emi” to refer to Emilia.

“As for Suzuno-san~~ she’s accompanying me to buy souvenirs~~”

“I see. But it’s really sudden.”

“No~~ it’s actually not that sudden~~ I should have returned earlier~~”

“Oh. But you will still come back, right?”

“About that~~ it will depend on the circumstances~~”

Even if she were to finish most of her work, it was not established that she could come here again, that was the downside of being an official.

And not knowing how the relationship between Emi and Lailah would progress later on, depending on the circumstances, Emerada, with her position as a politician, might have to shoulder a responsibility heavier than anyone else's.

Therefore, at least in the short term, Emerada was probably unable to come to Japan for sightseeing.

"But I was in my hometown until the day before yesterday, and I only returned here today. It was lucky I met you before you left."

"Hometown?"

"Yeah, my hometown is in Kobe. The last time I went home was probably two years ago. When I became aware of it, I realized it had been a long time since I had returned home… ah, oh yes."

At this moment, as if Rika had finally remembered the girl who was feeling awkward behind her, Rika introduced her to the two of them.

"She is my and Emi's junior, Shimizu Maki. Then, these two are Emi's friends, Kamazuki Suzuno and…"

Rika momentarily did not know if she should introduce Emerada directly—

"My name is Emerada Etuva~~ I'm Emi's friend from school~~"

—but Emerada openly used her actual name.

"Ah, you're the friend staying at Yusa-san's house, whom she met when she was on an exchange program, right."

At this moment, the female spoke for the first time.

"My name is Shimizu Maki! I have received a lot of guidance from Yusa-san and Sasaki-senpai!"

""Sasaki-senpai?""

For a moment, Suzuno and Emerada did not know who the female who called herself Shimizu Maki was referring to when she said that name, and looked at each other in confusion—

"She's referring to Chiho-chan."

—and Rika, noticing this, explained further.

"Maki-chan also knows Chiho-chan too."

“More accurately, Rika-san told Sasaki-senpai where my house was, then invited her over!”

For unknown reasons, Maki clasped her hands in front of her face and said this happily.

They did not know the whole story, but since this was a person Emi and Rika knew, it was not strange for her to have had an opportunity to meet Chiho.

However, no matter how they looked at her, Maki should be older than Chiho, why did she say Chiho-senpai?

“Oh my… could you be the person who took Emi in earlier~~”

“Kamazuki-san and Etuva-san know Sasaki-senpai too?”

“Yes, we are very close.”

“That’s right~~”

“Are Yusa-san and Sasaki-senpai doing well?”

“What do you mean?”

Suzuno felt perplexed about Maki’s question.

“Before, Emi and Chiho seemed to have discussed future plans together at Maki’s house.”

““Discussed future plans?””

“That’s right! At that time, Yusa-san stayed at my house for two days, and because she seemed to want to know about university, including the university I am studying at, I brought her around to a few universities. Sasaki-senpai came to my house on the last day, and Senpai seemed troubled about her future path too, so while I may have overstepped my bounds, I also provided some advice.”

“Emi-san, she…”

“University huh~~? You’re referring to university in Japan, right~~”

“Yes, she researched a lot of majors related to agriculture.”

Similar thoughts flashed through Suzuno and Emerada’s mind at the same time.

And those would be that Emi did not plan to accept Lailah’s request after all.

They did not know how serious Emi was about university, but she frequently spoke about wanting to bring Japan's or Earth's convenient and advanced tools back to Ente Isla.

Recently, Emi had been suddenly reunited with Nord, and this had probably given her a more solid purpose, which would be to restore her hometown.

It was natural for a girl born in a wheat-growing family to want to engage in further studies related to agriculture, and if she put her heart into it, what she could learn in Japan would be much more than what Ente Isla could offer.

In principle, Japan's universities offered four-year degrees, and if Emi planned to study seriously in a Japanese university from now on, she would be unable to leave Japan for at least five years.

"If that's her choice~~ I'll support her no matter what~~"

Emerada naturally showed a smile after she heard what Maki said.

"Emerada-dono…"

"Compared to all the humans in the world… or even my own family~~ I currently wish to prioritize Emi's life more~~"

There was a determination contained within Emerada's statement which Rika and Maki would not understand.

Inside that Moz Burger at Nerima Station, Emerada and Suzuno had listened to Gabriel explain the shocking truths which Ente Isla was going to face and the reasons behind them.

On this basis, even if Emi decided to abandon the world and chase after her own happiness, Emerada would still support her.

"I will stake my life~~ and get rid of everyone who wishes to hinder Emi~~ with Maki-san making an effort to provide various prospects about the future~~ Emi should grab this chance properly~~"

"Emerada-dono's strong determination, I have felt it deeply."

With regards to Emi's matters, Suzuno also harbored similar feelings.

"If she could go to university together with Chiho-dono, Emi-san would feel more reassured."

"Yeah~ but if their aspirations are a little different, their university, major, and subjects will be a little different. It would be difficult to attend the same school."

After Maki said this, she showed a smile as if she was up to no good.

“Ah, but other than furthering her education and obtaining a job, it feels like she can still choose a third path, honestly, I am rather curious about this…”

Just as Suzuno and Emerada were wondering what the third path was, Rika chided Maki with a troubled smile on her face.

“Maki, stop having those indecent thoughts.”

“Eh~~ but~~”

Maki, whose eyes were sparkling for some reason, did not back down at all.

“Doesn’t it make you curious? Anyone who knows Yusa-san and Sasaki-senpai would be curious about the man who can make both of them this happy.”

““…Ugh!””

Suzuno and Emerada used all their effort to contain their shouts.

Her interests laid in the complete opposite direction, but no matter how they thought about it, Maki could not possibly be talking about anybody other than Maou.

When Emi and Chiho were discussing their future paths at Maki's house, what did they talk about?

"Alas=Ramus-chan said that the person's last name was very strange, but from how that child called him Papa, Yusa-san's relationship with that man shouldn't be that simple!"

Maki's deduction was not completely correct, but it was not entirely wrong either, this caused Suzuno and Emerada to break out in cold sweat.

They did not want to comment too much on the friendships of others, allowing more Japanese around Maou or Emi to know about the truth was definitely not a good thing, and it would not have any positive effects on the people involved.

Therefore, Suzuno and Emerada did not wish for Emi to create any more situations where other people might end up knowing about her relationship with Maou, and the others in addition to the two of them began to suspect if Emi's carelessness in this aspect was inherited from her mother.

Just as the two of them were thinking about these things, Rika asked a question as if she had suddenly thought of something, "I just thought of something since Alas=Ramus-chan was mentioned, Emi has to work today, but Suzuno-chan went out with Emerada-chan, so today, Alas=Ramus-chan is…"

“Hm? Ah, that is right, since I arranged to go out with Emerada-dono today, I asked Ashiya-san to help take care of her.”

“Hm, I see. There’s nothing to worry about if you left the task to Ashiya-san. Is he okay with using the phone?”

“It was Rika-dono who helped him choose it after all?”

“That’s right.”

“Hm, I don’t really chat with him, he did say it was more convenient when communicating with others.

“Oh, I see.”

When she said this, Rika smiled lightly, then turned towards Maki.

“Maki-chan, if you don’t wish to be kicked to death by a horse because you obstructed another person’s love, then you should stop here. Compared to that, didn’t I tell you that I would accompany you for the whole day today?”

“Eh… but I’m not interested in beating a drowning dog…”

Maki frowned as if she felt dissatisfied and reluctant, and said unnecessary things.

Rika’s expression instantly turned into something resembling a beaming ogre.

“Good good, it looks like we will be out all night. Maki-chan, you can be the punching bag for the drowning dog [me] today. I want you to accompany me to the end, you’d better be prepared.”

“Eh? Ah, eh? Uh, erm… o-oh yeah! Since it’s a rare opportunity, do the two of you want to come along?”

““Eh?””

Maki, who realized that she had said something wrong, quickly invited Suzuno and Emerada, but this was stopped by Rika.

“I’m not going to let you escape, the two of them are very busy, you will learn the meaning of putting your foot in your mouth before going home today, not that I’m allowing you to go home.”

“Auuu…”

“Then, I’m sorry for suddenly stopping the two of you. Emerada-chan, after you have decided when you’re going back, remember to let me know. If I have the time, I wish to see you off.”

“Y-Yeah.”

“A-Alright~~ I got it~~”

After Rika grabbed the mysterious storm known as Maki and waved to the two of them, she started walking off, but she stopped after only walking a few steps—

“Help me tell Emi that I should be able to calm down soon and explain this to her properly. Excuse me for bothering the two of you today.”

“Er, erm, excuse us! See you another day!”

—turned back and said this, and without waiting for the two of them to reply, she grabbed the shouting Maki and disappeared in the Shinjuku crowd.

The two of them were left in the busy area in the evening and stood there, feeling stunned, and wondering what had happened.

“What was that about~~”

“I don’t know, but even if I did know…”

Rika had smiled instantly after hearing Ashiya’s name, and it looked so sad that it was heartbreaking; Suzuno definitely did not imagine this.

Since some time back, Suzuno knew that Rika liked Ashiya.

The impression she had just now was not based on groundless fear, something significant had happened between Rika and Ashiya which caused a dramatic change in their relationship.

“It’s meaningless to overthink this… but…”

Suzuno also knew that the relationship between Rika and Ashiya could be applied directly to Chiho’s relationship with Maou.

And this bond which formed strong ties between demons and humans was Lailah and her request.

Based on the current situation, Suzuno did not think that Maou and Emi would agree to Lailah and Gabriel’s request.

Despite having heard about the events in the past which had caused everything, Suzuno still thought this, her reasons were the same as Chiho and Urushihara — regardless of what tragedies occurred in the past, and the great

impact they had on the present, it had no direct connection to Maou and Emi, who were living in the present.

Lastly, to Maou and Emi, whether the two of them would agree to Lailah's request depended greatly on if their personal schedule allowed for it, and how they currently used their time while living in Japan.

However, Suzuno felt uneasy about other things.

Chiho was troubled over her relationship with Maou.

Chiho, who did not have any fighting prowess, could not decide on her future path with her own power, and after Lailah appeared, she started to mull over what exactly was her relationship with Maou, and started to want to know the answer.

If Chiho used any particular method to force Maou to clearly describe the relationship between them, Suzuno could not predict which way Maou's mental scales would tip.

If it was "Maou Sadao," it was possible that he would feel a connection with Chiho, and choose to accept Chiho.

But right now, "Demon King Satan" had to take responsibility for his citizens and the many lives which were lost during the invasion of Ente Isla.

Because Suzuno had the chance to come into contact with the deeper layers of Maou’s heart during the journey in Ente Isla, she could not guess what Maou was thinking at all.

What worried Suzuno the most was that perhaps to Maou, accepting Chiho’s feelings did not equate to living his life together with Chiho.

“Because that man unexpectedly loves to escape.”

“Who are you talking about?”

“Hm, ah, nothing, it’s nothing…”

“Then again~~ I wonder what happened with Rika-san~~”

“I’m not sure, but it doesn’t feel like something which can be asked about easily.”

“Yeah~~…”

“What’s wrong?”

Emerada looked at the crowd which had swallowed Rika and Maki, thought for a short while—

“Perhaps I shouldn’t go back after all~~”

“Eh?”

—and suddenly said this.

“Uh, erm, not going back, is, is that really okay?”

“Yeah~~ it feels like I can’t go back just like this~~”

“Rather than saying that you cannot go back just like this, is it not more like you have to go back?”

“Going back like this~~ feels like such a waste~~”

“A waste… you can experience Christmas next year…”

“That’s under the premise that there is still a next year.”

“Hmm?”

Emerada said it so directly, it gave Suzuno a shock.

“Do you feel that there will still be a next year?”

“Uh, erm, how should I say it?”

“Just like what Sasaki-san said, assuming the Demon King or Emilia do decide to accept Lailah’s request, it is not clear how long it will take. Depending on the choices of the Demon King, Sasaki-san, and Emilia, perhaps we will never see Japan’s Christmas ever again.”

Emerada’s expression was the same as usual, but her tone had turned serious, and Suzuno was unable to say anything in response.

“Therefore, I cannot leave Japan now. After hearing what Rika-san and Maki-san said, I have confirmed that Emilia wants to stay in Japan. Knowing Emilia’s personality, if she knows that things are hopeless from the start, she will not even struggle. However, that day, Emilia chose to hide it from me to go to Maki’s house to look for her own dream. Emilia wants to stay here, so I have to stay at her side and help her to do what she wants. This is so that next year, or the years after that, she can still spend Christmas in this country, therefore…”

At this moment, Emerada finally looked towards Suzuno, and smiled at her.

“I decided to enjoy Christmas to my heart’s content with Emilia this year~~! Alright~~! Change of plans~~! Let’s buy the Christmas presents which we’re going to give everyone~~!”

“Ah? P-Please, wait a moment? What about Saint Aire and Alberto-dono…”

“I don’t care~~ I’ll just take the souvenirs bought as an apology and throw all~~ of them through the ‘Gate’~~ then~~ let’s buy Alas=Ramus-chan’s present first~~ that child is still not used to me~~”

“Eh? W-We’re still going shopping?”

“A child’s Christmas present takes the most priority, right~~? Bell-san should be more knowledgeable of what that child would like~~”

“E-Erm, wait a moment! Is this really alright?”

“Hohoho~~ I want to toast with champagne or red wine~~ prepare scotch egg, roast turkey, spring onion tuna sushi, Langouste, and log cake made from sweet chestnut paste~~”

“It seems like many strange things have been mixed in! Emerada-dono! Wait for me!”

Suzuno hurriedly chased after Emerada who suddenly started running.

In the next two hours, Suzuno was forced to accompany Emerada to buy things from various places, and when she finally returned home, she was so tired that she could not speak.

“Bell, is your stamina that bad?”

“No, this has nothing to do with stamina…”

“But I heard from Demon King-sama that you also bought a lot of things when you first came to Japan?”

“Uh, it is not that problem as well.”

“Suzu nee-chan, you ‘orked hard.”

Suzuno, who was pulled to various places in Shinjuku by Emerada, was currently tiredly slumped over the kotatsu in Room 201.

Urushihara, Ashiya, and Alas=Ramus spoke their thoughts, and when Suzuno remembered the experience of shopping with Emerada, she became exhausted again.

“Did I feel uncomfortable because there were too many people, anyway, it felt really hot…”

It was a regular day, but carrying many bags of various sizes while shopping in Shinjuku during the evening peak hour in December while it was the Christmas sales period still required a lot of determination.

“Then? Emerada Etuva returned to Eifuku, right? Emilia and Demon King-sama are still at work today, what reason do you have to be here?”

“Hmm…”

“Uu?”

Ashiya’s question caused Suzuno to look towards Alas=Ramus, who was hanging on Urushihara’s shoulder as he faced the computer.

“Haah, should I consider it as Emerada-dono’s request, or am I just helping her run an errand?”

“What?”

“It appears that Alas=Ramus does not like her that much.”

“What do you mean, elaborate a little more.”

Ashiya, who was peeling potatoes, asked this while feeling perplexed, he did not seem to understand what Suzuno wanted to say.

"…Sorry, can you come over for a bit?"

Suzuno knew that she had to be more specific, but she did not want to discuss this topic in front of Alas=Ramus, so she reluctantly left the kotatsu and summoned Ashiya to the public corridor.

"So what is it?"

"Uh, actually… there's something which needs to be approved by the Demon King and Emilia."

Suzuno told Ashiya that Emerada planned to give Alas=Ramus a Christmas present to attract her attention.

"We had actually planned to buy it today, but in the end, we do not know what Alas=Ramus likes, and we must also consider the atmosphere of the adults around her."

"Hmm."

"I recall that Demon King and Emilia are working on both the 24th and 25th, correct?"

"So that's how it is."

Ashiya nodded after he understood what Suzuno had wanted to say.

Other than Chiho, to the people who gathered at this apartment, Christmas was just one of the many activities in the foreign world of Japan.

The most they understood about Christmas was that the working schedule would become more disorganized, but if Emerada wanted to give Alas=Ramus a present, things would be different.

Teaching a child what a festival meant was a very important thing to them.

By teaching them the special significance of the day, the season, the atmosphere on the streets, and the concept of the festival, all of these will be imprinted on a child's heart, allowing them to recognize that special atmosphere in the future.

However, like what was mentioned just now, the problem was that Christmas was a tradition in both Japan and on Earth; Suzuno and Ashiya did not place importance on this tradition.

In the first place, Suzuno believed in a different god, and as a demon, Ashiya did not need to specially celebrate the commemoration date of a human saint.

“Honestly, I am unable to judge if Alas=Ramus should be taught the traditions related to Christmas.”

“I understand what you mean, but it shouldn’t be much of a difference.”

“Is that so?”

“If Emerada Etuva wants to give Alas=Ramus a present, we have no reason to stop her, if Demon King-sama and the others feel that it’s too early to teach Alas=Ramus about Christmas, she’ll just have to give Alas=Ramus the present under another reason.”

“That’s true.”

“On the contrary, if Demon King-sama and Emilia wants to teach Alas=Ramus about Christmas, we also have no reason to oppose it. We have found various reasons, but on January last year, Demon King-sama and I did visit a shrine during New Year. Since Alas=Ramus is living in Japan, she has the right and the need to know some basic knowledge about society.”

Ashiya’s opinion was reasonable, but there was a reason why Suzuno could not agree to this directly.

That would be what Emerada had said.

“How long do you think our lives in Japan will last?”

“What?”

“Do you think it can last through next year?”

“…What are you saying?”

Ashiya did not avoid Suzuno’s gaze as she looked up at him and replied in a relaxed manner, “You should have heard about the type of work Demon King-sama is currently doing in MgRonalds, right? Demon King-sama is finally making some headway into the great ambition he has in Japan. Do you think we will give up on this opportunity and go somewhere else?”

“…I can take your word for it, right?”

Faced with Suzuno’s troubled gaze, Ashiya looked suspicious and opened his mouth, “Oh my. I thought that when it came down to it, you would prefer for Demon King-sama and Emilia to agree to that.”

“Don’t look down on me, I have no interest in viewing my friends’ lives as sacrifices.”

Suzuno said this angrily.

“Then don’t overthink things. As for whether a present should be given to Alas=Ramus, you and Emerada Etuva should just consult Emilia [mother] directly.”

“…I see, alright.”

“Are you done? I’m going to cook now.”

Ashiya turned and returned to the room after saying this, and then Suzuno said something which she just remembered.

“Alsiel.”

“Hmm?”

Ashiya, who was stopped again, turned back unhappily—

“I met Rika-dono at Shinjuku today, she was greatly worrying whether you knew how to use the mobile phone.”

“…I see.”

At that moment, Ashiya should have noticed that his expression had changed

Regardless of whether the person himself had noticed it, it was already enough for Suzuno to confirm that something extraordinary had happened between Ashiya and Rika.

“Do you want to contact her?”

“That’s true.”

After Ashiya said this simply, he left Suzuno on the corridor by herself, returning to the room directly and closing the door.

“…What exactly are we doing?”

Suzuno mumbled this, and stood in front of the door of Room 201 in a depressed manner.

Actually troubling over teaching a child the meaning of Christmas together with a demon, this was too much of a joke.

However, for Suzuno to end up in a self-mocking state because she had to confirm if this kind of thing “was considered normal” caused her to have a premonition — the strange and comfortable daily normal life spent in this apartment which gave the impression that it would continue forever might be gradually dissipating.

Since the day everyone went to Nerima, Maou, Emi, and Lailah had not negotiated in private, the two of them were acting as if nothing else had happened other than the fact that they had visited Lailah's room.

"What… am I hoping for everyone to do?"

Just as Suzuno was almost unable to suppress the unknown emotion rising within her heart.

"Eh? Suzuno? Why are you daydreaming here?"

Without realizing it, Acies, holding American style hot dogs which looked like they were bought from a convenience store in both her hands, appeared in front of Suzuno.

"Ah… it's Acies huh. Has the Demon King gotten off work?"

Suzuno looked around for Maou with a tired expression on her face, but felt perplexed when she could not sense Maou anywhere.

Just like with Alas=Ramus and Emi, Acies and Maou could not stay separated beyond a fixed distance.

Normally, when Maou was working at the MgRonalds in front of Hatagaya station, the area around Sasazuka station was within the range of that fixed

distance, but Maou was currently undergoing the full-timer promotion training and had to leave Sasazuka and Hatagaya to go to various places.

Therefore, Acies had to go with Maou, but even then, Maou could not bring Acies around with him when he was with Kisaki, so during the training period, Acies had to be in a merged state.

“No, he hasn’t left his workplace yet, but he returned to the Hatagaya branch store. He let me out in a place where no other people were around, and told me to go home first because Ashiya should be cooking dinner now.”

Unlike her older sister Alas=Ramus, Acies was very impatient, and according to what Maou said, she was so noisy that Maou wanted to dispel the merged state as soon as possible.

Then, because Maou happened to return to Hatagaya, he had taken the opportunity to let her out.

“You came to eat dinner, so why did you buy food on the way?”

“Some time back, Mikitty and Amane gave me some allowance and told me that if I’m eating at a home which is not Father’s or Mikitty’s, I should eat something first, or else everyone would cry.”

“Ah…”

After remembering Ashiya's close to crying expression when Acies asked for food the past few times and emptied the rice bucket, Suzuno could not help but agree.

When Acies saw Suzuno's expression of agreement, she puffed up her cheeks unhappily and said, "Hey, I've been a little bothered about this since some time back."

"Hmm?"

"Do I really eat that much?"

"You…"

Suzuno had the illusion that she had tripped over something and fallen over although she had been standing properly.

Then it seemed like the illusion she had was showing on her face, and Acies, who appeared to have sensed this, changed her expression to that of defeat.

"I see, so it's like that after all."

"A-Acies?"

"I sensed it vaguely too."

Faced with Acies, who might not even knowing the meaning of the term "vaguely," in various ways, Suzuno did not know what to say.

Based on what Suzuno knew, she had never seen Acies not overeat.

Compared to the amount of food she ate, Acies's body did not change significantly, but even if they found the best lawyer in the universe, the world's judgement that Acies was an extreme glutton could not be overturned.

"Hmm~ it looks like I can only negotiate directly with Maou, right?"

Acies said this suddenly.

"Negotiate directly with the Demon King? About what?"

"Many things. Such as asking Ashiya to buy more rice, allowing me to eat twice as much as usual when I am in a merged state, or buying me a mobile phone, things like that."

Suzuno did not expect that Acies had not given up on the mobile phone, and she also felt that the amount of rice was not the issue, but regretfully, even Suzuno knew that Maou would definitely not approve of the things which Acies spoke about.

“No, it might unexpectedly work. As long as I use Nee-sama as a shield, it will be easy to handle Maou.”

“If you use that ace up your sleeves too many times, it will become a double-edged sword where even Emilia and Alsiel turn against you, you know?”

Suzuno knew that Acies would frequently use Alas=Ramus as an excuse when she wanted others to agree to her request, but considering Alas=Ramus’s future, whether it was Maou, Emi, Ashiya, or Suzuno, they would not easily agree to Acies’s requests.

In fact—

“I can hear everything!”

—Ashiya’s voice of restraint was heard from within Room 201, causing Suzuno and Acies to flinch in fright.

“Oh my, I failed, I forgot that the walls in this apartment are very thin, I have to devise my plans without getting discovered next time.”

“Acies…”

She had just been scolded, but Acies did not look guilty at all, and even Suzuno felt stunned about this.

“Being the same as Lucifer and having other people take care of me, I have no right to say this, but isn’t this the time of year when I can make this kind of request? So I won’t give up!”

“Hmm? Time period when you can make requests?”

“That’s right! Maou has been playing dumb the whole time, but I know it! Christmas is a day where you can eat extravagant meals!”

“Eep…”

Suzuno dodged the ketchup squirting out of the American hot dog half eaten by Acies in the nick of time, then felt that she had heard a man’s scream of surprise coming from within Room 201, but she intentionally avoided thinking about it and pretended that she did not hear it.

“W-Wait a moment, Acies! We will talk about it after you finished eating! If the ketchup ends up on your clothes, it will be very difficult to wash it off! And, you cannot bring up that topic in front of Alas=Ramus yet!”

“Eh? I can’t mention hot dogs?”

“No, Christmas!”

Suzuno, who realized that her volume was too loud after saying this, frantically lowered her volume and whispered to Acies, “Erm… Alas=Ramus does not know about Christmas yet. Since there is such a chance, let’s put aside the matter of how we’re going to spend it, it would be better if we keep it a secret for now and make her happy later, right?”

“Oh! I see! It’s a surprise, right!”

Suzuno had just been discussing with Ashiya how to teach Alas=Ramus about Christmas, but she knew that if she wanted to stop Acies, she could only use methods which Acies found interesting.

If she said that it was for the sake of making Alas=Ramus happy, at least until the day itself, Acies would not explain anything about Christmas to Alas=Ramus.

“I understand! Then including this matter, I will discuss things with Maou properly. But I’m really agitated right now because I’m doing something I’m not used to, so I had better do it after I’ve calmed down a bit…”

Acies performed a special stunt of maintaining a stern expression in the area above her nose while stuffing the hot dogs in both her hands into her mouth at the same time, and not long after, there were only bamboo sticks in her hands.

“Anyway, I know that we’re giving Nee-sama a surprise now! Does Suzuno have any plans?”

“Ah? Uh, erm, I’m still in the planning stage, but Emerada-dono is very motivated…”

Being asked so suddenly, Suzuno mentioned Emerada’s plan.

Suzuno did not lie, but if Acies knew that there were other people taking action with regards to the Christmas plan, they might not be able to control Acies at the most important moment.

But what had been said could not be taken back.

Acies’s eyes started to sparkle and she showed a motivated expression; pretending the bamboo stick was the Hero’s holy sword, she raised it in the air and shouted loudly, “Yeah! I’m motivated now! And I have become hungry because of that!”

“What?”

“Bell! Damn you! I’ll remember this!”

“Ashiya, the Demon King is almost home, what are we eating tonight!?”

Ashiya’s resentful voice was heard from the kitchen window facing the public corridor, and Acies rushed into Room 201.

“Such a scary storm…”

After this storm left the area in front of Suzuno, it would probably exhibit its force within Room 201.

“…It can’t be helped. I feel a bit sorry for Alsiel, and since the Demon King is almost home, I’ll just quickly prepare something which can fill the stomach and share it with them.”

Thanks to Acies, or rather, because of what Acies had caused, when Suzuno thought that she would hear Ashia’s angry shouts later, she forced herself to change her mood and decided to return to Room 202 first.

※

After Acies finished trampling on the dinner at the Demon Fortress, a few hours had passed and it was now late at night.

Alas=Ramus was sleeping on the bed in Emi’s apartment at Eifuku, breathing steadily.

On the floor next to the bed, Emerada had placed her hand on Emi’s back, comforting Emi who was squatting on the floor and feeling upset.

“Haah~~ don’t be depressed~~”

“Do you think I am able to not feel depressed?”

“This can’t be helped~~ Emilia is busy with a lot of things~~ and this tradition doesn’t exist in Ente Isla in the first place~~”

“That’s not the problem…”

Emi groaned without raising her head.

“No matter how busy I am, it cannot be the reason why I have not considered Alas=Ramus’s welfare… that child has also gone through many painful things.”

At this moment, Emi finally looked up and spread open the almost crushed work shift schedule.

“Ahh, how can this be?”

Emi started to curse her carelessness from one month ago.

December 24th and December 25th.

Emi and Maou had work shifts on those day.

“Seriously…”

Then Emi held her head and squatted down again.

“If I had known this would happen~~ perhaps it would have been better if I did not mention it~~”

Emi’s strong reaction caused Emerada to feel troubled.

Emi went to the Demon Fortress after work to fetch Alas=Ramus and returned to her apartment.

Emerada waited for Emi to coax Alas=Ramus to sleep, and without any special intentions in mind, she asked Emi if she could give Alas=Ramus a present.

Then after Emerada had just finished speaking, Emi froze.

『Chr… Christmas?』

『Y-Yeah~~ erm~~ I heard it’s a festival to celebrate the birth of a Saint.』

『Christ… mas?』

『E-Emilia?』

『Christmas, when is it?』

Alas=Ramus had just gone to sleep, but Emi let out a shout, making others worry if she would wake up Alas=Ramus.

Then after Emi checked the calendar and her work shift schedule, she had remained in this state.

"Because… I didn't care about it at all last year… ugh!"

"E-Emilia~~ don't blame yourself too much~~…"

"Why have I not found out before today… whether it was when we handed in our work shift preferences, or when the work schedule was released, or when Sariel was noisily talking about how the pre-ordering of Sentucky Fried Chicken buckets had begun, there were so many opportunities to realize this…"

"Erm~~ I also think that you should have realized it during any of those times~~"

When she heard the part about Sariel, Emerada also showed a troubled smile.

“It’s a Saint’s birthday, right? I was unable to understand that happy atmosphere, so I spent it last year thinking how strange it was. I did buy a cake, but I only bought a small cake at a nearby convenience store to eat by myself and I did not think I did anything special, so…”

“Because you were too busy~~ and recently you were only going between your home, the apartment, and your workplace~~ which is why you probably did not notice the lively atmosphere on the streets~~”

“And from tomorrow onwards, all the employees have to wear Christmas hats at work… ahh, seriously!”

It was not as if Emi had forgotten about Christmas.

It was just that her experience from last year became an obstruction, she did not feel that there was anything to celebrate on that day, or that it was a day to spend a lively time with other people.

She only remembered that in the short time between the night of 25th to the morning of 26th, the decorations on the streets switched from Christmas to New Years in one go, giving her a shock.

"It's alright~~ it's fine even if we celebrate on other days~~ this doesn't have a direct relationship to us anyway~~"

"That's true, this festival has nothing to do with me. But… I wanted to teach Alas=Ramus that there are many happy things to experience from now on… but from the start I have… uuuu…"

"Uh~~"

This sentence from Emi caused Emerada to show a rather surprised expression.

"You want to teach her what Christmas is~~?"

"Yeah."

"In other words~~ you want to experience Christmas again next year too~~"

"…Yeah."

"……This means~~"

"There's no special meaning to it."

Emi finally got up and sighed deeply.

“I don’t know where Alas=Ramus and I will be on Earth’s 25th December next year. After all, on the same day last year, I was still thinking that I had to defeat the Demon King and return to Ente Isla, and on the same day the year before that, I was fighting the whole time. And on the same day next year, I will definitely smile and regret the idiotic action of accidentally making arrangements to work the year before.”

“…But~~ on this day of next year~~ you will definitely be with this child, right~~”

“…Yeah.”

“Other than this child~~ are there other people~~?”

“I will be together with everyone.”

“Everyone refers to~~”

“It means everyone, everyone whom I treasure at that time.”

After she said this, Emi took out her mobile phone from her bag and made a call.

“Hey, can you talk now? I hear some weird crying behind you, are you actually busy? Oh, Acies ate at your place huh… that’s unfortunate.”

Because Acies was mentioned, Emerada deduced that the person Emi was talking to on the phone was one of the inhabitants of Villa Rosa Sasazuka.

“Then, with regards to Christmas, I want to discuss things with you… no, of course not. We’re already shorthanded enough, I won’t say things like wanting to adjust my shift all of a sudden. No, Em, she… you have already heard about it? That’s right… yeah, my side feels about the same. Anyway, the beginning of the whole thing was that Em said that she wanted to give Alas=Ramus a present… yeah, it’s like that. So, even if it can’t be done on the day, at least on the 23rd or the 26th, even if it’s just either one of us, I wonder if she can do something for her. I see.”

At this moment, Emerada felt rather surprised.

The person Emi called was Maou. With matters related to Alas=Ramus, the only person who could make Emi say “either one of us” was Maou.

As Emerada gazed on, Emi continued to speak with the other party on the phone—

“Eh? Ah, w-wait a moment, Chiho-chan hasn’t… eh? You’re asking why… there’s no reason! I will have a proper discussion with her in the end, but right now, it’s still a little too early! Anyway, when I need to discuss it with

her, I will look for her on my own accord, so don't say anything unnecessary even if you see her tomorrow, okay? Just follow what I say!"

Maou had probably suggested discussing it with Chiho. Emi immediately became flustered, but without hearing the whole conversation, Emerada did not know the reason for acting this way.

"Em? Yeah, it seems like she's not going back. I don't know, but since Em said that it's fine, then there shouldn't be any problem. Yeah, alright, goodbye, thanks for the hard work."

This conversation continued for a few minutes and in the end, with both sides not sounding especially agitated, it ended.

"Is it the Demon King~~?"

"Yeah, he seemed to be preparing for bed, so he was a little unhappy."

Emerada was concerned about who was crying on the other end of the line just before going to sleep, but Emi did not bring this topic up, and looked at Alas=Ramus's sleeping face as she laid on the bed with her arms raised above her head.

"He seemed to understand what I wanted to say. But that guy is a demon, right? So it appears that he had never thought about what to do for Alas=Ramus during Christmas and became a little depressed."

“Depressed, huh~~”

“Because this concerns Alas=Ramus.”

After Emi plugged in her phone to the charger and placed it on the table, she sighed in exhaustion.

“Since the Demon King has been busy recently, even if he knew that Christmas was approaching, it did not feel tangible to him. He even made an excuse, saying that he thought that it was a day for humans to feast on cakes and chicken.”

“Doesn’t MgRonalds only offer cakes for birthday celebrations~~?”

“It appears that he did not have any work shifts arranged during that time, and went to a convenience store with Alsiel to sell cakes.”

After Emi said this, she looked towards the wrinkled work schedule.

“Chiho-chan is resting on the 24th… but unlike the birthday celebration from earlier, we don’t know how the Demon King’s training will be arranged, so we can’t hold it within the store.”

“If we held it in the store~~ and Alas=Ramus-chan shouted ‘Mama’ while the Demon King and Emilia were together~~ that would cause a panic, right~~?”

“That’s true, and the birthday celebration from before was already barely staying within the rules, and this time, there will be other work seniors in the store, so we can’t do that. Haah, what should we do?”

As she spoke, Emi looked at the photo frame placed on the wardrobe.

That was one of the photo frames gifted to her in October when everyone had held a joint birthday celebration for Emi and Chiho, and other than Maou, the photo contained everyone who attended the event, with Emi and Chiho in the center.

At that time, Maou stubbornly refused to join in the photo.

The one who took the photo was Maou, and though Ashiya said that he could help him take the photo, Maou said in a forceful tone that he was still at work and refused.

Emerada also followed Emi’s gaze and turned towards the photo, and as she looked at Chiho, smiling brightly next to Emi, Emerada asked, “Why can’t you discuss this with Sasaki-san~~? Rather than planning it with us, who do not know much about Christmas~~ it would be more reliable to ask for her opinion~~”

“Ah… that’s because…”

In response to Emerada’s question, Emi opened her mouth after thinking about it for a while, but even after a significant amount of time, she did not continue.

Not only that, for unknown reasons, her face had turned a little red.

“Erm… I’m not sure whether I’m overthinking this or if I’m just being too self-aware, but anyway, it might be so.”

“What~~?”

“Recently, there seems to be a slight discord between Chiho-chan and I.”

“Ehh~~? Did you and Sasaki-san have an argument~~?”

Emerada was very shocked.

Emerada was not very close to Chiho, but she could not imagine a situation where Emi and Chiho were not on good terms.

“It, it’s not like that. We are talking normally, and we did not have a quarrel. But as long as it’s something to do with Alas=Ramus, the Demon King has to

be mentioned, and looking for Chiho from the start to discuss such things, it just doesn't feel right."

"Ehh~~? I don't really understand what you're saying~~?"

"Ugh, I don't really know how to say it either. Ahh, it's making me sweat."

"Emilia~~? You seem to be acting a little strangely~~?"

"I-I know that, I am aware of how strangely I am acting. Erm, simply put…"

Emi, who was sweating in this cold weather, fanned herself with her hand while picking up the remote control for the air-conditioning to confirm the temperature.

"…I, I received a lot of help from the Demon King during that incident in the Eastern Continent earlier, right?"

"That's right~~"

"Then, erm, I am currently a newly hired employee at MgRonalds, so Maou, the shift manager at the time, became responsible for my training."

"Yeah~~"

“During that period of time, Lailah suddenly appeared, then, didn’t I do a lot of embarrassing things?”

“I am unable to deny that~~”

“Yeah… haah……”

As if she felt a little regretful, just very tired, or that she was trying to sort out her feelings which were beyond her ability to handle, Emi spoke.

“The Demon King… during this time, he had treated me kindly.”

“…………Hmm~~?”

Emerada’s eyes widened in surprise.

“So… I… seemed to have made Chiho-chan jealous.”

“Yeahhh~~?”

“Earlier, before visiting Lailah’s house, the Demon King and I… erm, a lot of things happened.”

“Hmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm~~?”

It was not clear if Emerada understood what Emi said; Emerada bent over and came close to Emi who was holding her head and trying to escape Emerada’s gaze.

“Emilia.”

Then she whispered in Emi’s ear, “What do you wish for me to tell you?”

“…Uh.”

After Emi feel silent for thirty seconds, she spoke in a very faint voice, “…I don’t know.”

“Can I speak honestly?”

“…Yeah.”

“Depending on the situation, I might have to fight the Demon King immediately.”

Emerada’s tone was serious.

“It feels like the Emilia right now is completely different from the Emilia I knew before. Depending on the reason that caused you to turn out like this, in various ways, I will have to respond appropriately.”

“…Erm?”

“I am very emotional now. Forget about those reasons before, I want to know what ‘a lot of things’ which happened between you and the Demon King refers to.”

“W-Wait a moment? N-Nothing happened, okay? Nothing strange happened…!”

As Emi said this, she remembered the “night she had a huge malfunction,” this caused her face to turn redder.

Then, Emerada did not overlook this obvious change in Emi.

“Just the fact that you know that ‘something’ had happened which caused Sasaki-san to be jealous has caused a storm to form in my heart. It’s not calm at all.”

“It, it’s really nothing! It’s just an accumulation of insignificant things!”

“Then say it clearly. Since those are insignificant things, you should be able to say it, right? What did that barbaric and dirty demon do to my important Emilia?”

“I-I already said it’s nothing much!”

“Be quiet, you’ll wake up Alas=Ramus-chan like this.”

“That’s because Em is using strange methods to force me! I’ll talk! I’ll talk about it, back off a little!”

Emi shouted, and Emerada also obediently complied with her request, sitting properly some distance away from Emi and staring at Emi in the eyes.

“It, it’s really nothing much.”

As Emerada’s gaze was too scary, Emi could not help but say something which sounded like an excuse, but in the process of listening to Emi’s explanation,

“Haah~~ this is so stupid~~”

Emerada’s posture became more and more relaxed, her reproachful gaze turned sluggish, and in the end, she even laid on the floor, eating a rice cracker taken out from an unknown place.

“Do you know~~? In this world~~ this is called Stockholm Syndrome~~”

“I know that, I researched it!”

On the other hand, Emi felt that she was coming close to melting from her rising temperature and cold sweat.

“Haah~~? For me~~? No matter how the relationship has improved on the surface~~? Between the Demon King and Emilia, I don’t think~~? That anything would really happen~~? Haah~~ Sasaki-san too~~ she looks so mature on the surface~~ but she’s still a girl after all~~”

This sentence, when said by Emerada, who looked much younger than Emi and Chiho in terms of physical appearance, did not sound convincing at all.

“Haah~~ considering the Demon King’s personality~~ it’s not that difficult to understand, right~~? Rather than saying that these things were for Emilia’s sake~~ Wouldn’t it make more sense if it was for the sake of Alas=Ramus-chan~~? Other than the fact that your heart was momentarily messed up~~? And you accidentally hugged him~~?”

“Uuuuuuuuuuu.”

Emi started to wish that she could melt on the spot and disappear.

“But from the beginning to the end~~ nothing significant enough to cause Sasaki-san to feel jealous happened, right~~”

“B-But the Demon King and Lailah also said that it was like that.”

“The distance between the Demon King and Emilia~~ is abnormally huge in the first place~~ so even if only normal things happened~~ it would look like the distance had suddenly reduced greatly~~”

“Ugh… p-perhaps it’s like that.”

“Haah~~ stupid~~ really stupid~~”

“S-Stop calling me stupid! I’m very confused too!”

“Ahh~~ the consequences of Ente Isla robbing Emilia of her youth are too huge~~ and the guys who went through the hard journey with us~~ are only a shaggy uncle and old man~~ haah~~”

Emi realized that Emerada felt as surprised as Lailah.

However, no matter what, from Emi’s point of view, she only felt that it was useless to say such things to Emerada.

“However~~ if it’s like that~~ I roughly understand why it’s inconvenient to consult Sasaki-san~~ after all, you can’t tell her ‘I want to hold a Christmas party for the child of the person you have a one-sided crush on, but I am working on that day, what should I do~~’”

“Em!”

Emerada’s overly straightforward way to describing things caused Emi to scream, though she did not know if it was from anger or surprise—

“Uhm…”

“Ah…”

—but because Alas=Ramus rolled over unhappily, she could only close her mouth once more.

“I understand~~ since it’s like that~~ as the proposer~~ I will look for Sasaki-san and Bell-san to discuss this~~ and think of a way to resolve it~~”

“Eh? Is, is that so?”

“Ah… it would be better to ask Rika-san too~~ it’s the same with the birthday party from before~~ it feels as if Rika-san will probably provide many good ideas~~”

“Eh, ah… erm, Rika…”

“What’s wrong~~? Could it be that you and Rika-san are also interacting awkwardly with one another~~?”

“It, it’s not like that…”

“I met her today~~ but she looks the same as normal~~?”

“Eh? You met Rika?”

“Yeah~~ in front of the company~~ she seemed to be going out to drink with a junior called Maki~~ and she appeared to have just returned to her hometown far away recently~~”

Maki was probably Shimizu Maki.

As for going back to her hometown, it was probably referring to Kobe, but Emi did not know about this.

Of course, Rika had no obligation to report to Emi about her activities, but after Rika sent a message saying that she was going out with Ashiya, she had not contacted Emi since, if she had returned to her hometown during this time, it bothered Emi in various ways.

“Ah… and also~~ I’m very hesitant if I should tell you~~ but she asked me to tell you something~~”

“What?”

“She asked me to tell you~~ that she would probably be able to calm down soon and explain things to you properly~~ although I don’t know what that means~~”

Emerada did not know this, but Emi only thought of one thing.

“…I see, I understand.”

“Does this have anything to do with the reason why you can’t look for Rika to discuss things~~?”

“Yeah, this is annoying, I don’t really know what is related and what is unrelated anymore.”

“Emilia~~?”

“Next year… where will I be next year, and who will I feel is important?”

“Isn’t there a saying~~ that you’ll be laughed at by demons if you mention things about next year~~?”

“It’s ghosts, ghosts and demons are completely different, it’s better to be laughed at by ghosts, if I’m laughed at by demons…”

Emi looked down and hugged her legs.

“The current me would really feel very depressed.”

At this point, even Emerada did not know what to say.

※

The day after Emerada listened to Emi’s super simple confession.

Emerada used Idea Link to contact Alberto, informing him that she did not plan to return.

When Alberto heard it, he was momentarily speechless from shock, but because he knew Emerada must have had a reason for doing so, with a voice of completely giving up—

『I don’t care what happens later, okay.』

—he said this line, and cut off the Idea Link.

Emerada was very happy that she could get the other party’s understanding, but because that last sentence was too infuriating, she swore in her heart that she would definitely not buy any souvenirs for Alberto.

“Hm~~ but~~ it might not be possible for Sasaki-san to be jealous of Emilia~~”

It was already close to afternoon, but Emerada was still wearing pyjamas, lying comfortably in the guest futon next to Emi’s bed and thinking about things.

“Hm… no matter what~~ I don’t know what I don’t know~~”

After that, she took a close to one hour nap, and she finally got up after waking up—

“I just have to confirm it for myself~~”

—and thought of something really crazy.

She looked towards the work schedule on the fridge which had been wrinkled because of the incidents of last night, and discovered that Emi, Chiho, and Maou were working in the evening.

“Once you’ve seen it~~ it becomes a hundred rumors~~ kicked over the cliff and shattering~~”

Emerada hummed a mysterious tune and happily prepared to leave the house.

However, there was still some time until Chiho reported for work, so she would not be able to observe properly even if she went to MgRonalds now, and it was possible that Emi would see through her intentions and chase her away.

Therefore—

“That’s the way things are~~ please allow me to interview you~~”

“I don’t really understand it, but please go ahead.”

Thirty minutes later, Emerada appeared at Villa Rosa Sasazuka Room 101, sitting at the kotatsu with Nord and Iron.

Nord was surprised by Emerada’s sudden visit, but still welcomed her into the room.

“Iron~~ hello~~”

“…Hello.”

Iron was reading.

It seemed to be a Japanese book, and Emerada gave Nord a questioning gaze.

“Ah, Shiba-san gave it to him, this was bought at a second-hand store, but it appears that these children can understand the language of this country even if you don’t directly teach them. Ah, have some tea.”

Emerada accepted the tea cup Nord passed to her, and warmed her body which had turned a little cold from within.

“Erm~~ I only want to ask one thing today~~”

“Hmm?”

“I want to ask Emilia’s father~~ about the man who will marry your daughter in the future~~ what expectations do you have for him~~?”

“…………Hmm?”

Nord was unable to understand the purpose of this question, and froze instantly.

“Uh~~ I definitely don’t mean anything special with this~~ it’s just that although I am still single~~ I think parents would definitely place their children’s happiness as number one~~”

“O-Of course…”

“What I want to know~~ is that what kind of life do you want Emilia to live in the future~~”

Nord could not grasp what Emerada, who had a smile on her face the whole time, was getting at, but holding his cup, he still thought about it for a while —

“…I don’t really have any special thoughts about it.”

“Eh~~? Is that so~~?”

“Yeah, there’s none.”

With his hand on the kotatsu, Nord supported his cheek with his hand, and said with a serious expression on this face, “Lailah and I are parents who have been unable to give our daughter a happy life. Parents like us... should not be qualified to tell the man who would be Emilia’s partner 『Please make my daughter happy』.”

“This is an issue of being qualified~~? I feel that it is closer to a parent’s duty~~”

“Emerada-san may say so, but since I moved here, I occasionally think about this issue. And every time I think about how Emilia will continue living in the future, I think that it might be an unexpectedly good idea for her to settle down in Japan.”

“Why is that~~? I might be too much of a busybody saying this~~ but during our travels~~ Emilia was always hoping that she would be able to restore the fields of her hometown together with her father, you know~~?”

“Yeah, I know, Emilia had told me about this. However, because I have been living in Japan for a rather long time, I have become a little more familiar with this place.”

Nord showed a bitter smile.

“In this country… no, in this world, there shouldn’t be any man who is stronger than Emilia, right?”

“……Yeah…… probably~~ it’s like this in various ways~~”

Even Emerada could not help but feel shocked by Nord’s directness.

“If so, then no matter who Emilia marries, it is likely that she will not be unhappy. Don’t you think so?”

“It feels that this train of thought is skipping too many things~~”

“During the journey, her mental strength should have increased exceptionally. The loneliness Emilia felt in this country also trained her. Of course, it would be best if she did not experience such things, but since these are things which happened in the past, then these experiences should be used to help improve her life. In addition, that child is not stupid, and she will probably not be attracted by men who are lazy or lack morals, so as long as they are someone chosen by that child, I will not have any opinions about it.”

“…I see~~”

“Out of curiosity, are there any signs that Emilia has that kind of person?”

“No~~ erm~~ currently, there are none… if she really had that kind of person~~ I would be unable to discuss such things with you~~”

“That’s true.”

Nord smiled in a joking manner.

“Then~~ I want to ask a rather sensitive question~~”

“Okay. If I can answer.”

“Alright~~ then I’m not going to hold back~~”

Emerada asked, her expression unchanging, “Do you think Emilia~~ will celebrate Christmas in this country next year too~~?”

“……”

Nord fell silent.

“Acies said… that Christmas is a day where many delicious things can be eaten.”

On the contrary, Iron, maintaining his original expression, said something which showed that he was completely influenced by Acies.

If Amane or Ashiya were present, their expressions would definitely become stiff.

“And next year, the year after that, or even the year after that.”

Emerada dropped the mellowness in her tone at the end of the sentence.

“You think so?”

“That…”

“You should know about it, right? What your wife, wishes for Emilia to do.”

“…Yeah.”

As if his throat had rusted over, Nord’s voice became a little bitter.

“I have said so before, I am on Emilia’s side. This feeling of mine will not lose to Sasaki-san’s, I am supportive of Emilia doing what she wants to do, more supportive than anyone else. So I do not wish to see her being involved in a battle she is reluctant to take part in. It’s the same even if the whole world wishes for her to do so.”

“…”

For a period of time, only Emerada’s mellow voice, the sound of Iron flipping the pages of the book, and the soft footsteps coming from Room 201 upstairs, which were probably coming from Urushihara as he walked between the area next to the window and the kitchen, could be heard.

After close to five minutes had passed, Nord finally spoke in reluctance, “Recently, Lailah and Emilia will occasionally return together.”

After saying this, Nord looked towards the thin porch door of Room 101.

“It… must be because I don’t know anything, which is why I don’t have any expectations. Because I don’t know what futures they should have, and I don’t know what kind of futures I hope for them to have

The things Gabriel told Emerada, Chiho, and the rest at the Moz Burger at Nerima, it was impossible for Nord — the one who loved Lailah deeply, to not know about this.

Because he knew, he felt troubled now.

His own daughter might obtain the immortality she did not want.

“It’s regretful, the day I went to my wife’s apartment, we were only busy with cleaning up the room. We did eat dinner at a family restaurant at Nerima, but it was only until I returned to this room did I realize that it was the first time our whole family had sat down and eaten together. And because I was too tired that day, I don’t remember what I had ordered.”

Nord showed a strange smile which was a mix of loneliness and happiness.

“But, that was a very happy time. Although I don’t know if they thought so too.”

"…"

"I must be hoping for them to live an unchanging normal life — the kind of life where they would not really remember what they had eaten the day before. I expect them to have similar wishes. But if this goes on, not long after, an important fragment would definitely be missing from this happiness."

Would that be Emi, Lailah, or Nord?

"Emilia already knows what Lailah's wish is."

"?"

This unexpected sentence caused Emerada to suck in a breath.

She knew that the distance between Emilia and Lailah had decreased, but did not expect that it had developed to this stage.

"This does not mean that Emilia has already accepted Lailah. But like what I said just now, recently after work, Emilia has begun to return to this room together to Lailah. Using a different method from Maou-san, Emilia is trying to stand on the same level as Lailah. The two of them have recently been frequently chatting in this room."

Though Nord said “the two of them,” this did not mean that Nord was not present.

Just like how Maou appointed Chiho to be his witness, for the sake of speaking fairly with one another, Emi and Lailah separately asked their father and husband, respectively, to be the witness.

“Perhaps she planned to listen to everything before directly rejecting it again.”

Emerada was shocked at first, but she felt that it was very possible for this to happen in the end.

Nord simply explained what he had heard, and these contents were mostly similar to what Emerada, Chiho, and the others heard in the Moz Burger at Nerima.

“I married Lailah while knowing that she was an angel, and I was the one who proposed.”

“Oh~~”

Emerada, who thought that Nord would start to talk about his romantic history again, instantly adopted a wary attitude—

“She cried and said that she was an immortal existence, and that she, who was no longer human, had no expectations of her ability to give birth, and was unable to grow old with me. I was not bothered about these things, I truly loved Lailah, and she loved me too, so I felt that there was nothing happier than spending my life with her and I kept pleading with her.”

And realizing that it was about romantic history after all, she became a little stunned.

“But with Emilia’s birth… Lailah must have felt afraid. She successfully became an Ente Islan in the end, but Emilia, who inherited her blood, might be different from the other people of Ente Isla. When I heard this, the Demon King Army had already attacked and Emilia and I were already separated. I mentioned this before when going to Chofu, right? That was something which happened when I had just arrived in Japan.”

Thinking about it, Nord had revealed quite a lot of romantic history at that time, Emerada, who almost commented on this, nodded frantically and swallowed those words.

“I don’t know if immortality is a good or bad thing. If my daughter and wife can retain their youthful appearance even after I die, it might be a good thing. However, they will definitely part with many people they like very much, and constantly experience similar things. Then as immortal existences, if they feel tired about living one day, in the end, they will definitely…”

Nord intentionally avoided mentioning that action.

"I don't know. As a father, I hope my daughter can live happily for as long as possible. There are many happy things in this world, so many that all of them can't be experienced no matter how long one lives. However, when living for too long, the painful and miserable things will also increase. So I hope that Emilia's life can come to an end just like that of a normal person. But with this, it means Emilia will have to participate in a battle against her will. If she goes to battle, she might be killed during it. If I sent my daughter, who might perhaps live on forever in her young and beautiful state if she did not participate in the battle, to her death, I would probably regret it for the rest of my life. What would be the right thing to do, what is considered happiness to Emilia and Lailah, I really do not know."

"Nord-san…"

"If I had the power to fight, if there was a future where the world could be protected without having Emilia fight, I would be more than willing to volunteer for the battle. If I can obtain the secret to immortality in the process, I would probably be able to support my daughter's and my wife's decision as a father and a husband. However, I am much weaker than Emilia and useless, I can only quietly watch them make their choices, this has filled me with regret."

"…I don't know what happiness is either…"

Iron placed his small hand on Nord's hand, which had been clenched so tightly that breaking the tea cup was a real possibility.

"I only know that the two of them understand how much Nord is thinking about them, so please don't blame yourself too much, because it's not just Lailah and Emilia, you also gave me and Acies happiness."

"Iron…"

"I am eating until I am full every day."

"Aha… being able to fill your stomach~~ is a very happy thing~~"

The joke Iron said with a stern expression caused Emerada to smile.

"I am unable to choose on my own, but I definitely will not forget this town and the happy times I have spent with Nord and the rest for the rest of my life. No matter what choice is made in the end, Emilia and Lailah will definitely think this way. So Nord, you're definitely not useless."

"……Yeah, it'll be good if it's like that."

Emerada could not tell what Nord thought of Iron's words, but after he wiped away his tears with his hand, he turned towards Emerada again.

“With regards to your first question, for someone like me who can only watch from the side… I can only reply this way.”

Nord’s expression which looked like a mix of total defeat and as if he had cast off something did not feel fake at all.

“If Emilia wishes to enjoy Christmas in Japan next year as well, then I’ll be willing to dress up as Santa or anything like that. I will do my best to accompany her on the path she wants to take, that is my wish.”

“…Thank you, please forgive me for asking such a rude question.”

Therefore, Emerada honestly apologized for using this method to investigate the other party’s true feelings.

◇

Room 101 of Villa Rosa Sasazuka.

The mother and daughter pair were still a little awkward when facing each other, but from Nord’s point of view, since the day of the huge clean up, the relationship between the two of them had increased greatly.

Lailah explained how Ignora countered the endemic plaguing their home planet, and how she discovered the immortality technology; Emi showed an unconcerned attitude and listened quietly.

In this scene, Nord was playing with Alas=Ramus.

It may have been awkward, but it was still a happy space.

Lailah's story was almost similar to what Gabriel told Chiho and the others, but at this moment, Emi and Nord still did not know about this.

"In the beginning, these two people came to the research facility on the moon as additional researchers. When I saw the photo on identity cards they used to enter and leave the research facility, I got a shock. They looked like children who had just graduated from school after all. When I saw them in person, that impression only deepened. The person who brought them was Sariel from the Law Department which had close relations with the research facility. The influential people who sponsored the research sent him over to take care of them."

"Oh…"

Almost one year since Lailah, Gabriel, and the others started their research on the endemic eroding their home planet, when they hit a bottleneck, their home planet sent two young researchers over.
The names of these two researchers were Kael and Shakeenah respectively.

“The young man was called Kael, the young lady was called Shakeenah. Kael’s hair was mainly silver all over, but had a section of purple fringe in front.”

“Silver and purple hair?”

“Hmm? Is something wrong?”

“Mama, what is it?”

Emilia’s shocked gaze was directed at Alas=Ramus’s face as she was riding happily on Nord’s back.

Lailah, who looked in that direction as well, nodded and spoke, “That’s right. Kael is the personification of ‘Yesod’ of our planet, Shakeenah was the personification of ‘Malkuth.’ However, at that time, we did not know this, The people of the research facility thought that the big shots of our home planet wanted to obtain the results of the research sooner, so they sent their relatives who had just graduated from university. Everyone kept encountering setbacks after researching for one year, so the atmosphere was very tense.”

However, after those were assigned to be Ignora’s assistants, the research suddenly progressed.

“It was a mouse experiment… of course, I’m referring to using the mice of our planet as test animals… but for the first time, we discovered a genotype which could counter the endemic. After that, the researchers changed the way they viewed Kael and Shakeenah. Ignora credited this result to the two of them. Normally, this would invite a lot of unnecessary jealousy when this was done within the research world, but because a certain person kept patching up what Ignora and the others did not know about the world, no conflicts happened in the end.”

“A certain person…”

Emi suddenly looked up towards the roof.

There was someone who had been mentioned before only in the beginning of Lailah’s explanation, and deducing from how Lailah had phrased it, that person should be…

“That’s right. That person was Sataniel Noi. As Ignora’s partner, he was an outstanding researcher, as well as a sorcerer… sorry, dear, he was also a senior I admired at that time.”

“Yeah, at your age, it’s normal to have that kind of experience.”

Lailah said this while looking at Nord, but the latter’s expression did not change much, and he continued to concentrate on being Alas=Ramus’s horse.

This husband and wife did not know their limits once they began talking about their love history, so Emi had thought that her father would feel jealous, but luckily, Nord was not that immature, and Emi breathed a sigh of relief.

“Ignora was a classic genius type of researcher. On the other hand, Sataniel was the hardworking type of researcher. Sataniel knew very clearly that his abilities did not match up to Ignora, so he fell in love with Ignora and her talent. He was not the type to see someone as an enemy because of jealousy. And because he had that kind of personality, he was popular with all the men and women, including me; I was still a newcomer in the Infirmary, and would frequently deliver medical equipment and medicines to Ignora, so I had many opportunities to speak to him, and harbored feelings of admiration towards him.”

“Let me ask this as reference, what kind of man was he?”

“Father…”

Emi used her gaze to hold back her father who managed to hold it back before, but was now interrupting the topic from a strange angle, but Lailah complied unexpectedly.

“Actually, this part is rather important. He is a fair person. Since he’s an outstanding sorcerer, he’s not like a normal researcher who did not know much about the world, and would frequently focus on reality. However, he

knew how to strike a balance, if he drank too much alcohol the day before, he would nonchalantly show up late the next morning. And he is strong as well, he seemed to have done unarmed combat training with the Head of Security, Gabriel, at the Relaxation Room in the research facility at that time. Unbelievably, despite his opponent being Gabriel, who was trained in the military, Sataniel won all the rounds. As Gabriel was feeling regretful because he'd lost ten rounds consecutively, Sataniel told him 『I can only protect myself, but you can protect other people, because you are around, everyone feels safe. Though I displayed stronger power than you, I am unable to make anyone feel safe.』 He was such a cool man that he could say things like this."

For Lailah, who would normally display her love towards Nord without holding anything back, to say this much, it appeared that Sataniel was really an amazing and charismatic man.

Even so, Nord still looked a little dissatisfied, but as if he understood, he stopped asking questions in the end.

"But because of this, I felt it was strange in the beginning. Not long after Ignora obtained help from Kael and Shakeenah and produced results, the quarrels between Sataniel and Ignora strangely increased. And most of the time, they were quarrelling about Kael and Shakeenah. It felt as if Sataniel wanted those two to keep away from Ignora. This was despite the fact that he had been on their side in the beginning. I asked him the reason later, and it turned out that Kael and Shakeenah's discovery was genetic engineering,

which had never been investigated by any researcher and did not have any related research papers. At that time, none of the countries had such observational technologies. Being able to discover these results, it was a little strange."

After Lailah heard those words at that time, she deduced that after Ignora had received help from the two of them, she might have used her talent to understand all of it.

Sataniel expressed his suspicions to some people, but all their answers were the same.

"This matter ended for the time being here, but afterwards, Ignora's research progressed significantly. Even Sataniel was unable to keep up with this research. And Kael and Shakeenah were still staying at Ignora's side. Everyone was shocked. Ignora did guide them, but how were such young people able to keep up with this research which even Sataniel could not understand? Since the priority at that time was to progress the research, while Sataniel felt it was suspicious, he stopped pursuing it, but somewhere in this mind, he was still suspicious about their origins, existence, and intelligence. Then at a certain time, Sataniel roped in Sariel and started investigating their origins."

Sataniel pretended that he was on a break and returned to the home planet to investigate Kael's and Shakeenah's backgrounds, and discovered signs that their birth records had been altered.

The two of them did not have correct birth records.

Not only that, other detailed information about their birth and family records were all faked.

Based on the results of Sariel's investigations, he could only conclude that on a certain day, Kael and Shakeenah had suddenly appeared by the side of the powerful politician who had recommended the two of them.

"Can Sariel's investigation be trusted?"

"He may act like that, but he's very serious when it comes to work matters. That bad habit really caused a lot of damage to him."

Since Lailah said "he may act like that," it meant Sariel had been a flirt since that time.

Anyway, when Sataniel confirmed that Kael and Shakeenah were really suspicious, and returned to the research facility on the moon, he was faced with a totally unexpected situation.

"Ignora also seemed to have become suspicious of the overly outstanding Kael and Shakeenah. Using an excuse of a medical check up, she conducted full body scans on the two of them and tracked down the DNA records which

the two of them had entered in their registrations. From that DNA sample, she discovered that their genes were decisively different from normal people. It appeared to be the focus of the mice experiment conducted before, which deduced that humans should also have an immortality gene. I may have been a doctor at that time, but I was not familiar with genetic engineering, so I did not know the actual situation. But it was said that within the cells of Kael and Shakeenah, the gene which determined the limits of cell regeneration did not function at all."

There were physical differences, but because of this characteristic, the cells' regeneration limit had already been decided for all living things, and once they reached this limit, they would die because their lifespan has ended.

Lifespan was not solely decided by this regeneration, but on modern Earth, it was still believed that this was an important factor in lifespan, some theories believe that should these regeneration limits could be removed, aging and death could be slowed down.

"In addition, their genes displayed a strong immunity against all the illnesses which we already knew of. The fact which shocked Ignora the most was that the two of them did not have any cancerous cells at all."

"Having no cancerous cells means they have no cancer? For young people, this should not be strange, right?"

“This is medical knowledge from our planet… which is close to 10,000 years of knowledge, but cells in the human body frequently turn cancerous for various reasons. Even so, if the tumor suppression gene is working normally, they can quickly purge or fix the cells which are about to turn cancerous. In situations where the tumor suppression gene loses its function or when the cells mutate due to various reasons and cause the cancerous cells to spread, we call it the occurrence of a malignant tumor, or that they have cancer.”

Emi only knew about the existence of cancer after she came to Japan, and had a very fuzzy understanding about this illness called cancer.

“The human body will be damaged for various reasons like ultraviolet rays and free radicals, with repairs happening frequently. During this process, the very beginning stages of cancerization are occasionally mixed in, this is definitely not a strange thing. But logically, it was impossible for a body to not experience this phenomenon at all, because that meant the cells did not get damaged at all.”

At this point, Lailah reminded them again, “This is the situation of the humans on our home planet, so I don’t know if this can be applied to the cancer observed in Ente Isla’s or Earth’s humans. But based on what I know, there should not be much difference. After learning the secret of Kael’s and Shakeenah’s bodies, Ignora carefully observed the difference between their genes and her own genes, and unbelievably, she only spent one month to find a method which could possibly cause the human gene to become similar to

these two people. When Sataniel's holiday had ended and he returned, it was already at this stage."

After that, Ignora's research stalled once again for unknown reasons.

The reason was because Kael and Shakeenah suddenly disappeared.

Everyone felt suspicious about this, but Ignora and Sataniel no longer cared if the two were around or not.

With Sataniel as her assistant, Ignora started to research on the endemic, focusing on genetic engineering, and came to certain conclusion in the end.

"Kael and Shakeenah are specious humans. In other words, they are something like aliens. They have DNA which does not match the native human race. However, they exist as humans. Ignora believed if they could find out about their origins, they could obtain a clue to further the research on both their genes. Sataniel, who knew they faked their origins, also helped Ignora to investigate Kael and Shakeenah's origins. Then… Sataniel and Ignora found the existence which could be called their parent body."

That thing looked like a wilted huge tree at first glance.

But the strange thing was this existence which looked like a wilted tree was located on the surface of the moon which did not have an adequate atmosphere.

Why did the humans, who were able to explore the other planets in their star system, miss this out?

However, based on the map of the moon's surface, that tree was located on the opposite side of the base where the research facility was located, and when they first did a scan from space, they were unable to find any useful underground resources there, so they did not develop to that area — that was the conclusion made in the investigations conducted later on.

"The reason Ignora was able to discover that tree was thanks to holy magic scanning. In the land that had nothing, Ignora discovered there were a few places with an especially high concentration of holy magic. On the other side of the moon, one of the locations, known as a holy magic spring, was the location of that tree. You should have guessed it already, that was the Tree of Life of our planet, the parent body which gave birth to the Sephirah Kael and Shakeenah."

Ignora collected samples of the Tree and discovered that the Tree's DNA was the same as Kael's and Shakeenah's DNA.

Kael and Shakeenah may not have been around anymore, but they could still extract unlimited research samples from the giant tree.

Ignora's and Sataniel's research was progressing greatly every day.

“At this point, I want to change the topic a little… Sataniel harbored feelings of affection towards Ignora. Besides her talent, he also deeply loved her as a person. The reason I only admired Sataniel and did not harbor any feelings of love towards him was because he was expressing this so obviously; anyway, after Kael and Shakeenah disappeared, Ignora and Sataniel took only five years to achieve immortality. During this period of time, the distance between the two of them decreased greatly, not just as researchers but as man and woman. The day the two of them finally established the method of genetic modification for immortality such that the humans would no longer have to fear the endemic… they got married.”

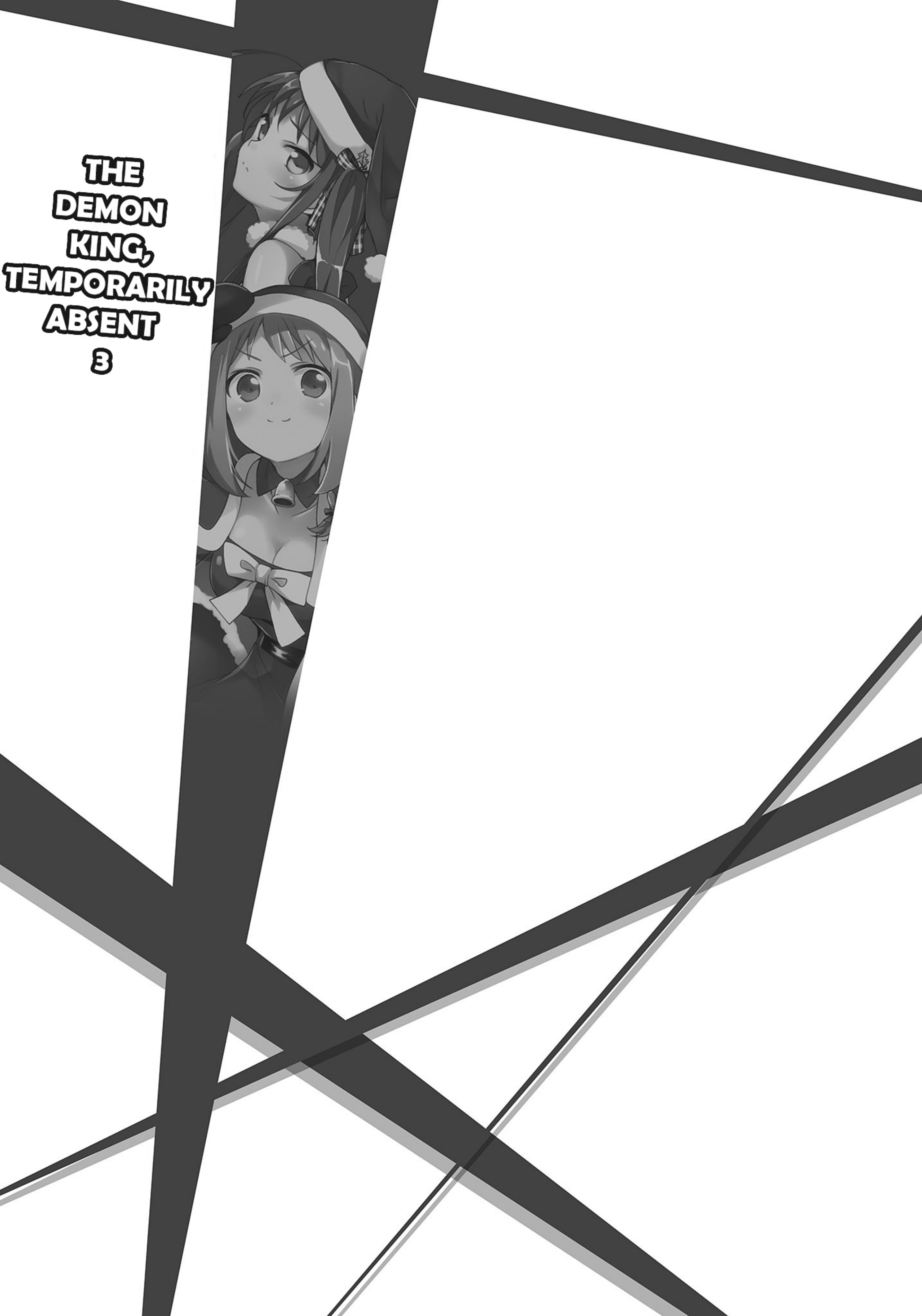
“Eh?”

At this point, even Emi could not help but let out an airheaded sound.

“Eh, t-that means, erm, Ig, Ignora is Lucifer’s mother… does that mean Sataniel… no, the Ancient Demon King Satan is, ehhh?”

“That’s right, it’s like that.”

Seeing her daughter display her strongest reaction since the beginning, Lailah nodded and said, “Sataniel Noi is Lucifer’s father.”


THE
DEMON
KING,
TEMPORARILY
ABSENT
3

Chapter 3: The Demon King, Temporarily Absent 3

After confirming Nord's feelings, Emerada left Room 101 and, as planned, headed towards the MgRonalds in front of Hatagaya Station to observed Emi and Chiho while they were working.

The last time she had gone to that store was during the joint birthday party, but luckily she reached her destination without getting lost.

In the evening sky, which had long since been dyed red, Emerada met Chiho, who happened to be sweeping, in front of the store.

"Eh? Emerada-san? Did you come to eat?"

Chiho ran over with a smile when she noticed Emerada, and her face did not show any signs of jealousy or negative feelings.

Then Emerada noticed that Chiho was not wearing the usual employee cap on her head, but the Christmas hat which was mentioned earlier.

"Did Yusa-san know that you're coming today?"

"No~~ I didn't tell her~~"

“I see! If she knew that Emerada-san is here, she would definitely get a shock. It’s cold outside, please come in.”

“Then~~ I’ll respectfully comply~~”

After entering the store under Chiho’s prompting, Emerada noticed that all the employees had changed into Christmas hats, just as Emi had mentioned last night.

She did not know what it would change, but it at least created a festive atmosphere.

“Do you know how to order?”

Chiho asked this in a considerate manner to Emerada, who probably was not used to Japan yet.

“I think there shouldn’t be any problems~~ if I don’t know~~ I’ll just pretend to be a foreigner and ask someone at the counter~~ then again~~ it feels very lively in the store~~”

“That’s right! From today onwards, the store will switch to Christmas mode. This is my first time working in the store during this period, so I’m looking forward to it. Ah, I have to return to cleaning now, please take your time!”

“Alright~~ do your best~~”

After Emerada watched Chiho leave while holding a broom and dustpan, she went to the counter and queued up.

Emerada surveyed her surroundings curiously, then, deep behind the counter, she noticed the side profile of Emi who was wearing some equipment and was currently communicating with someone.

The slim lady who was stationed on the second floor was Kisaki, the Shop Manager.

The queue in front of the counter was moving slowly, Chiho appeared again and opened up another register, as the queue gradually shortened, Chiho winked once towards Emerada.

“…Eh?”

As Emerada was queuing, she noticed something strange.

The number of people was different from what she had seen in the work schedule before.

Even Emerada, who did not know all the employees in the store, could immediately notice that someone was not around.

“What happened to the Demon King~~?”

Emerada, who was called over to the counter manned by Chiho, asked this in a low volume.

Because there were other customers around her, Chiho also answered softly, “Maou-san is training outside today, he’ll come back later.”

Thinking about it, Emi did mention last night that Maou was recently busy with the training.

Thanks to Chiho, Emerada completed her order smoothly, and because the fries were not yet ready, she received a number plate, and holding a tray with only a burger and a drink, she found an empty seat.

Then she saw Chiho speak with Emi, who was standing deep behind the counter.

Emerada did not observe any abnormality in how the two of them conversed, and did not sense any of the negative atmosphere which Emi was worried about.

After Emi noticed Emerada in the direction Chiho pointed towards, she showed a rather flustered expression.

In the end, it was Emi who delivered the newly prepared fries to Emerada's seat.

"Why did you suddenly come over?"

Emi asked as she took notice of the customers around her.

"Oh my~~ because Emilia was acting strange yesterday~~ I was a little worried~~"

"…Liar, you only came to watch the fun."

"I can't deny that too~~"

Emerada nodded without guilt.

"Since the Demon King isn't around~~ I can't watch the fun even if I wanted to~~ I did hear that he went for training~~ but what kind of training is it~~? The Demon King should be one of the main forces of this store, right~~?"

"…Ah, I didn't tell you about this before? It's training to be hired as a full-time employee, he has to go almost every day during this period, it seems like he's going to formally become a full-time employee."

“Full-time employee… ehh?”

After hearing this news, Emerada could not help but get up from her seat in surprise.

“T-The Demon King seriously plans to become a worker in this country~~?”

“It seems like that has always been his goal, so other than us, the others aren’t that surprised. Apparently, he wore a suit which did not really suit him and went to many places with Kisaki-san, as for today, he went by himself to other branch stores with different operating models to work.”

MgRonalds may look like it only had delivery and MdCafe as its special business models, but unexpectedly, it could still be subdivided into many types.

For example, a mini-Mags set up in supermarkets and other large commercial facilities where the seating had to be shared with other stores in the food court.

A “drive through” setup next to the expressway where people could order without having to leave their car.

A MgRonalds with special facilities specially set up in tourist locations upon request, such as within an amusement park which were limited in scale and operation times.

“Because it was not known which store he would be in charge of after becoming a full-time employee, he was be sent to various stores and operating locations to accumulate practical experience.”

“Oh, does that mean~~ that the Demon King will become the Shop Manager of this store soon~~?”

“I don’t know if it will be this store, but I don’t think it’s that easy.”

Since it was full-timer promotion training, only employees with matching qualifications could take part in it.

In addition, even if they participated in the training, it did not mean that they would definitely become a full-time employee.

Because it was different from normal hiring processes, even Kisaki, who was a Shop Manager, was unsure about the full training process, either way there were people who took part in the almost one year long training as a part timer and still did not become a full-time employee in the end.

“Then the Demon King, who did not like Lailah that much in the first place~~ would definitely not agree to her request~~ after all he finally has a chance to fulfill the goal he has been working hard towards~~”

"………Perhaps."

Emi replied vaguely.

"Sorry, I have to return to work now."

"Ah, alright~~ sorry for disturbing you~~"

"It's alright, take your time… thank you for waiting, this is the MgRonalds store in front of Hatagaya Station, my name is Yusa…"

Emi briskly walked away from Emerada's seat, pressed on the equipment over her ears, and started speaking to someone.

For a while, Emerada observed what Emi was like when working, then Chiho walked over and started a conversation with her.

"How's the taste? This is the limited Winter meal set which was not yet released during the joint birthday party."

"Yeah~~ it's very delicious~~ but it feels like I would become fat if I ate it every day."

"Ahaha, that's true."

"Emilia mentioned it to me~~ the Demon King seems to be working very hard~~"

"Ah, it's about the full-timer promotion training, right? Maou-san has always been working at this store with that as a goal. Recently, when he does show up at the store, he always looks very motivated."

"I see~~"

"Maou-san, being overly spirited, comes close to quarrelling with Yusa-san, but no matter what she says, Yusa-san seems to be supporting Maou-san a lot."

"Oh~~ that's a little unexpected~~"

"It's not that unexpected though? Since returning from Ente Isla, Maou-san and Yusa-san do not get into conflicts with each other that frequently anymore."

Emerada instantly remembered what Emi was worried about before and looked up at Chiho, but she was unable to sense any feelings related to jealousy after all.

"However, because Maou, the master of the house, has become busy, there aren't many chances where everyone can eat together at Room 201, this is

quite a pity. With such a good opportunity, I thought everyone’s relationships would improve a little, but things do not go as planned after all.”

After Emerada heard this, she intentionally asked an evil question.

“However~~ if the relationship between Emilia and the Demon King becomes too good~~ they might become an actual married couple because of Alas=Ramus, you know~~?”

Emerada had thought that Chiho would become flustered, angry, or she would deny it.

But Chiho’s reaction did not conform to any of that.

“Hm, personally, I don't want to lose, but if that is to happen one day, I guess it can't be helped.”

While Emerada gave her a stunned look, Chiho puffed her nostrils and showed a defiant smile.

“Of course I won’t just stand by and watch things become like that! At crucial moments, even if my opponent is the Hero of the Holy Sword or Demon General, I will do my best!”

“Oh…… hmm?”

Before Emerada could think about who Demon General referred to—

“And because I like Maou-san and Yusa-san the most, no matter what happens, I am confident that I can maintain a good relationship with them!”

She discovered that there was no haze in Chiho’s overt declaration, these were clearly Chiho’s true thoughts.

Simply put, Emi did not have to worry about it at all.

“I really lost to you~~”

Emerada felt that she was inferior for investigating others.

Deciding to give up, Emerada whispered to Chiho, discussing something which she had not planned to discuss here originally.

“I planned to discuss this with you later…”

Once Emerada said that she wanted to hold a Christmas party for Alas=Ramus, Chiho’s eyes lit up, and she agreed to go with Emerada to the Demon Fortress after work to convince Ashiya and the others.

By the time Chiho got off work and visited Room 201 with Emerada, it was already six pm.

“Christmas party? Why have you thought of such a troublesome thing again?”

Everyone in Room 201 ignored Urushihara’s irritating voice.

“Alas=Ramus has also worked hard with Yusa-san! Emerada-san’s idea is really good!”

“For the decorations, it would be fine if we make it according to Chiho-san’s instructions, right? I have time, so leave the shopping to me.”

“Since it’s a party for Alas=Ramus, then it can’t be helped.”

“Thank you everyone~~ getting everyone’s agreement has made me more confident~~”

“I didn’t agree at all… hey!”

Even Ashiya approved of Emerada's suggestion, so Urushihara said the things he must say, but knowing that his opinions would definitely get rejected, his expression showed that he had already given up.

"However, regardless of the scale, the biggest issue is still location."

Ashiya surveyed the room.

"If it is for Alas=Ramus, there will probably be a lot of people attending the party. It can't be held in this room at all."

Normally, Room 201 would barely fit the seven people Maou, Ashiya, Urushihara, Emi, Chiho, Suzuno, and Alas=Ramus.

If they added the minimum number of people like Emerada, who suggested holding the party, Alas=Ramus's younger sister Acies, Iron, who Acies treated as a younger brother and ran around with him, and Nord and Amane, who would watch Acies and Iron when they were together, Room 201 would probably be too tightly packed.

And it was not enough to just look for people to attend, since it was a Christmas party, then the types of food provided would have to increase, and just as Suzuno said, they needed to prepare decorations.

"Unlike Sasaki-san's and Emilia's joint birthday party, it can't be held at MgRonalds this time. Did all of you consider this?"

“Yes~~ with regards to that~~”

As if she was having misgivings towards Ashiya and Urushihara, Emerada spoke, “I want to hold it in Emilia’s room~~”

“…What?”

“Ah, I don’t have to go already?”

“Urushihara-san!”

Emerada’s suggestion caused Ashiya to frown and Urushihara expressed it more obviously in his attitude, causing him to get scolded by Chiho.

“Bell-san and Sasaki-san~~ both know about Emilia’s room right~~?”

“Yes. If it is there, it can hold that many people. How does Emilia feel about this…”

“I haven’t told her yet~~ after all, not everyone is available on the 24th or 25th~~ and since the star of the party is Alas=Ramus~~ the Demon King has to be present~~”

“Hm… if it’s related to Alas=Ramus, Demon King-sama probably won’t reject it, but if it’s held at Emilia’s home…”

Ashiya looked up suddenly as if he had suddenly remembered something,

“Thinking about it, it’s not just me and Urushihara, I don’t think Demon King-sama knows where Emilia lives.”

“Eh?”

The one who felt shocked by this sentence was Chiho, and Suzuno, who knew about this from Emi, chose to observe this situation quietly.

“Ashiya-san, Maou-san, and Urushihara-san don’t know about Yusa-san’s home?”

“Of course, I know she lives in an apartment in Eifuku, but I just realized that other than not knowing the exact address, I don’t even know if I have seen the apartment she lives in.”

“You’ve never been there before?”

“Because Maou doesn’t need to go there on his own accord, right? After all, she comes over every time, makes a ruckus, then returns on her own.”

“Ah, t-that’s true.”

Urushihara said this in a straightforward manner, and Chiho had to agree with what he said.

“Emilia probably doesn’t want to invite us over too, and we could not use demonic magic freely in the past, even if we were somehow able to find Emilia’s house and attack, we’d only be defeated by her.”

It was frequently forgotten because everyone was on good relations recently, but in the end, Maou and Emi used to be sworn enemies.

Ashiya ignored the shocked Chiho and returned to the topic at hand.

“Even if we want to hold it in Emilia’s room, she probably wouldn’t welcome us over. However, Alas=Ramus won’t accept Demon King-sama not attending, so it would be better to look for another location?”

“Your worry is correct~~ actually other than being spacious~~ there are other reasons I chose Emilia’s room~~ I felt that if I chose to hold it in Emilia’s room~~ someone else would be willing to come~~”

“Because it’s Yusa-san’s room? Could it be Lailah-san?”

“Yes~~ that’s right~~”

Emerada nodded to confirm Chiho's deduction.

"I think the distance between Emilia and Lailah~~ should have shortened a little because of what happened before~~ but because of that~~ we need to use this chance to let Lailah know that her plan will not be fulfilled so easily~~"

"In other words, teaching Alas=Ramus about Christmas is a way to show Lailah how determined Emilia is to settle down in Japan?"

Since the day Emerada saw Rika and Maki, she began to suspect whether there would be a next year.

At the same time, Emerada became aware that she did not wish for Emi to agree to Lailah's request.

"I want to listen to everyone's honest opinion~~ whether it's from Alsiel or Lucifer~~ or Sasaki-san and Bell-san~~ do you think Emilia and the Demon King should agree to Lailah's request?"

The four of them looked at each other for a short while.

"Alsiel and Lucifer have heard Lailah's explanation in this room before~~ so with regards to what Gabriel told us~~ the both of you should have some

level of understanding right~~ honestly speaking, the more I listen~~ the more I feel that Emilia and Maou do not have to help them~~"

"Haah, that's true? Even I, as one of the people involved then, want to stop caring about it. However, if Maou chooses to do so, then it's another story."

"Even if Demon King-sama chooses to agree, I will express my disagreement. Especially since it's a key period in Demon King-sama's work, if Demon King-sama's future gets affected because extra burden is added, it would be putting the cart before the horse."

"I feel the same way too. I want to respect both their choices, but the requestor is really lacking sincerity."

"I mentioned to Urushihara-san before that the past of the people in Heaven is pitiful, but the things Gabriel-san and the others are saying now are really too selfish."

"That's true~~"

After hearing the opinions from the four of them, Emerada smiled in satisfaction, nodded and said, "I think that Emilia and Lailah's relationship improving~~ and whether Emilia will agree to Lailah's request are two different things~~ Emilia has many people she treasures~~ in both Japan and Ente Isla~~ there are many things Emilia treasures~~ so I feel that there is a

need for Lailah and the others to know~~ that it's not that easy to convince Emilia~~"

"But, that is only Emilia's situation, it's unrelated to Maou, right?"

"The Demon King is going to become a full-time employee~~ that means his connection with Japan is going to become stronger, right~~? So with things as they are now, even without doing anything in particular~~ the current him would not agree to Lailah's request, right~~?"

"That's true."

"It is like that."

Chiho and Ashiya nodded.

"And~~ even if it means that we're making use of the guests we invited~~ because we are holding it in Emilia's room~~ we can invite other people who will become our comrades~~"

"Could it be…"

Once Suzuno leaned forward, Emerada nodded and replied,

“It would be difficult for Maki who doesn’t know any details about the situation~~ but Rika-san would probably come~~?”

““…””

At this moment, Chiho and Ashiya’s expressions froze simultaneously, Urushihara and Suzuno firmly saw this scene from the corner of their eyes.

“I feel that we should properly let Lailah know that other than Sasaki-san~~ Emilia has other important friends in Japan~~”

How Emerada interpreted both of their stiff expressions remaining unclear, she continued to explain excitedly, “The demons might feel that it’s troublesome~~ but if everyone agrees to organize this party~~ I hope that the location will be set as Emilia’s room~~ of course other than Alas=Ramus-chan’s present~~ I will pay for all the other expenses~~ I will also be responsible for convincing Emilia~~”

“Since she is paying for all of it, then what’s left is seeing if Maou has anything to say about it?”

With a wait and see attitude, Urushihara spoke to Ashiya, but Ashiya still had a stiff expression on his face.

“Demon King-sama is busy enough right now. Since I have already expressed my agreement, I will be responsible for passing on the message, but even if

we do hold a party later, I cannot guarantee that Demon King-sama can attend.”

“Alright~~ of course~~ 『Papa’s』 opinion is needed for such a thing in the first place~~ so afterwards, it will be decided according to everyone’s convenience.”

Emerada, whose thinking had become very close to that of a Japanese person, bowed once to Ashiya, and left Room 201 immediately.

As Ashiya and Urushihara did not appear interested in this, Chiho and Suzuno tried to convince them afterwards while chatting about Maou’s work at the same time, and when they realized that it was getting late, they stood up.

“Then it’s about time for me to go back.”

“You’re leaving? Why don’t you leave after eating dinner?”

“Thank you for your invitation. But I didn’t tell my mother that I was eating dinner here, so I have to go home… Urushihara-san, if Maou-san says that he wants to hold the party, you have to come too!”

In response to Chiho’s reminder, with an emotionless expression—

“Haah, I’ll try my best?”

—he replied simply.

“Sasaki-san.”

“Yes?”

Ashiya spoke to Chiho as she put on her shoes at the porch.

“Let me see you home, I have to go out to buy things anyway.”

“Eh? Ah, alright.”

Because there were no dangers recently, Chiho frequently returned home on her own, but even without considering this, Ashiya’s suggestion seemed a little sudden.

Before hearing Chiho’s answer, Ashiya grabbed the ultra light down jacket from the front of the closet and, following Chiho, he left the apartment.

“…Sorry, I actually have something to say to you, whether it is seeing you home or buying things, it’s just a side task.”

“I thought so as well.”

When they left the apartment, Ashiya admitted it.

Ashiya would normally not make such forceful actions in a rash manner, so Chiho, who believed that he had a reason, was not surprised.

“Ah, of course, I will see you home properly, and buying things is not a lie. But, erm…”

“Is it about Suzuki-san?”

“…Yes.”

Ashiya walked one step behind Chiho.

“She probably met with Sasaki-san after that, right?”

“Yes, on the day itself.”

Chiho answered Ashiya’s question honestly.



“I see, it makes sense then.”

Ashiya nodded with a troubled expression which Chiho had never seen before.

“Because it seems like Emilia doesn’t know anything at all.”

This sentence contained the meaning that if Emi knew what Ashiya had done to Rika, she might carry out some aggressive action.

“I thought Suzuki-san probably didn’t say anything, because she mentioned being unable to speak to Emi about this.”

“I see.”

Ashiya sucked in a breath forcefully, then took out a brand new Slimphone from his pocket.

“Sorry, in the end, we still caused Sasaki-san… erm… to worry because of the Demon King Army’s oversight.”

Ashiya chose his words carefully.

What did he originally plan to say, and why did he feel the need to choose his words carefully?

“Hohoho, even so, we are attracted because of your carelessness. It would be troubling if all of you continue being this naïve. However, based on what I have heard, Ashiya-san is more honest than Maou-san in this aspect.”

Chiho intentionally used a cheerful voice to say bad things about Maou.

Ashiya looked downwards at Chiho in shock, but immediately gave a troubled smile.

“I really don’t have the right to lecture Demon King-sama, seriously…”

Without realizing it, whether it was the Jizodori Shopping Street or Sasazuka Station, they were already dyed in the colors of Christmas.

As if the two of them were observing the scenery of a faraway world, the two of them looked at these flashy decorations.

“I had thought that humans were existences I did not need to be concerned about.”

Chiho did not believe her own ears, because this was the first time she had heard such a human like sigh from Ashiya.

This sigh was Ashiya’s first time sighing because of his own past.

“I don’t regret it, but I’m still thinking... about how she is doing after that.”

“Suzuki-san is not a weak girl who would cry herself to sleep just because she was dumped.”

“Which is why I’m worried.”

Ashiya’s words could not be any more accurate.

“No matter what aspect.”

Ashiya looked at Chiho.

Chiho painfully understood what Ashiya wanted to say.

However, no matter how the two of them thought about it, it was something which did not have an immediate solution.

“Regarding the party being held at Yusa-san’s house, do you want me to tell Maou-san?”

So Chiho tried to switch to a topic which required more immediate attention, and Ashiya also went along with it, replying, “No, since Emerada Etuva said so, for the Demon King Army to quickly make a unified conclusion, I should be the one passing on the message.”

“I see, it might be better like this. Recently, the times Maou-san returns to the store seem to not match up with mine at all, thinking about it, we have not met for a very long time.”

“I see. So it does become more complex in various ways when aiming to be a full-time employee.”

After that, the two of them talked about normal daily topics such as Maou and the store, and they reached Chiho’s home not long after.

When parting ways, Chiho said to Ashiya when she was standing in front of the door to her house, “Thank you. If the party is to be held, I hope Ashiya-san can attend.”

“I…”

“Ashiya-san, I might be a bit arrogant saying this.”

“Yes?”

“But I feel that Ashiya-san and Rika-san have misunderstood something. I was not present at that time, but from how Ashiya-san is acting, I feel that it should be like this.”

“Uh…”

Chiho spoke with a smile on her face, “The Ashiya-san right now truly cannot lecture Maou-san. Because although you thought that you had given an answer, you actually have not.”

“Eh?”

“That’s how it is. Thank you for seeing me home. Goodbye!”

Leaving Ashiya with a huge mystery, Chiho left the stunned Ashiya behind and entered her house.

“Thought I had given an answer… but actually have not?”

Ashiya, with a serious personality, could not understand the meaning behind this sentence, and after returning to the apartment without buying anything, he was forced to go out again.

※

“Hm… it seems like we can’t make it ourselves, and we have to consider what happens after it ends.”

The next day, Chiho, who was scheduled to work, showed a troubled expression as she observed the Christmas decorations put up around the store.

“What’s wrong, Chi-chan, what’s wrong with the decorations?”

“Ah, Kisaki-san.”

Shop Manager Kisaki Mayumi, who was confused by Chiho’s actions, asked as she used a finger to point at the golden tinsel located just above Chiho.

“Is it broken anywhere?”

“Ah, no. I was just thinking about what the decorations for Christmas look like, and took the chance to observe when I had the time…”

“When you have the time, you’re supposed to use it to check if there is any other work to do.”

Kisaki intentionally placed her hands at her waist and glared at Chiho.

“S-Sorry.”

“Then? After looking around, did you notice any broken or strange looking decorations?”

“Uh… no.”

“Very good, then quickly get back to work. Maa-kun is not here today as well, so we will be short of one person, it will probably get chaotic at dinner time, I’m counting on you.”

“Yes!”

Thanking Kisaki who let her off the hook although she was slacking, Chiho followed Kisaki to the area behind the counter.

“Where is Maou-san going today?”

“He’s going to a store where the shop manager is from the same batch as me but has a different operation model. However, Maa-kun been to that store many times, so he should be able to handle today’s job with ease.”

“Did he go to Fushima Park?”

A shop with a manager from Kisaki’s batch which Maou had been to many times before, the MgRonalds opened within the amusement park Fushima Park would be the most likely candidate.

“You know about it huh. Because the pace of operations within a branch in an amusement park is very specialized during the active period, it would definitely be one of the designated places during the hiring training.”

“Does that mean the training programme is decided beforehand?”

“…”

In response to Chiho’s question, Kisaki glanced around her to confirm the situation around her and spoke carefully, “I only learned this after I sent Maa-kun to the training, I heard that for the people taking part in the hiring training, the chances of becoming a full-time employee is actually pretty low.”

“Eh!”

“The contents of the training are only known by the Human Resources and General Affairs Departments, after the initial accompanying period, only the supervisors of the trainees… shop managers like myself… will receive a notification of when and where the trainees will go. The shop manager from the same batch as me, Mizushima from Fushima Park, will normally tell me some information of what happens behind the scenes, but the management level of the people involved this time is too high, so it’s probably not possible this time.”

Kisaki lowered her head slightly as she started thinking.

“I feel that Maa-kun is an excellent employee. However, according to the information I received from the headquarters staff, the people who pass the promotion training might not be the people who perform very well on the job. Honestly, I don’t know what the standards are. Of course, I believe in Maa-kun, and I hope that he will do his best.”

Kisaki took off her cap and headphones, then put them on again.

“However, I want to expose Maa-kun to a larger world…”

“Kisaki-san?”

“…Ah, no, it’s nothing, this has nothing to do with work.”

After Kisaki answered vaguely, she returned to work.

“Kisaki-san… it feels like she doesn’t want Maou-san to become a full-time employee. What’s going on?”

Kisaki should have known very well that Maou wanted to become a full-time employee.

However, the words just now sounded as if she felt uneasy that Maou was continuing to accumulate more experience.

After that, dinner time really became very busy just as Kisaki said, and until she left the store at ten in the evening, Chiho did not have time to rest at all.

“Oh, Chiho-chan is leaving at this time too?”

“Ah, Yusa-san, thanks for the hard work.”

Emi was working today as well, but Chiho did not remember speaking to her at all.

When the time to get off work arrived, Chiho slumped on the chair in the employee room exhaustedly, and it was only until Emi came over that she finally relaxed.

“There’s a lot of people today huh.”

“Yeah. For unknown reasons, the deliveries kept receiving orders from far away addresses. It’s so cold today, yet Kawada-san has been working outside the whole time.”

“He said that deliveries were easier, but it’s probably not that easy when the weather is this cold.”

“Yeah. And being forced to stick a sticker of a Christmas Tree on the safety helmet makes no sense too.”

The business office distributed stickers with the MgRonalds logo on it, but it had to be stuck on manually, and Kisaki had sighed, saying how unnatural it looked.

“Then again, were both of you discussing Christmas decorations?”

“You saw?”

Chiho got up and pointed at the Christmas Tree drawn on calendar in the employee room.

“I was studying what the Christmas decorations look like. Thinking about it carefully, I rarely looked at them seriously once I’d grown up.”

“Ah, I see. Could it be because of what Em said?”

“Yes, it is.”

Emi showed a troubled smile, placed her palms together and said to Chiho, “Sorry, Em seems to be too motivated.”

“It’s fine, I’m looking forward to it as well. Recently, the opportunities for everyone to eat together have decreased, and I don’t know if Emerada-san has mentioned it to you, but once I think of it as a rally, it’s very motivating.”

“Rally?”

Emi felt that the term “rally” was too hot blooded, but immediately understood Chiho’s words.

“Ah, did Em say that she wanted to invited Lailah and Rika, I see how it is now.”

“Yes! I will not hand over my important friends so easily!”

Chiho’s motivated self felt very bright to Emi.

“So I’m going to gather my energy and make my own decorations! Those were my original thoughts, but the method seems to be very different from Tanabata.”

“That’s true, it’s not like we can really go to a mountain, cut down a tree, and take it home.”

“Yeah, whether it’s the the gold and silver tinsel, or the decorations on the Christmas Tree, they don’t look like they can be made, we’ll have to spend money to buy them.”

“There’s no need to make it so formal…”

“No way! If Alas=Ramus-chan is to enjoy Christmas, we can’t cut corners!”

“T-That’s true…”

It felt as if the brightness around Chiho had increased further.

“Even so, it’s no good if we become too motivated and turn out like Maou-san during Tanabata, and just as I was thinking that this should be properly discussed with everyone if we’re going to spend money, Kisaki-san found out.”

Chiho gave an embarrassed smile.

“Tanabata huh, that was troublesome.”

Emi smiled as well and remembered what happened during Tanabata.

When Suzuno had just arrived in Japan, Maou went to the house of a regular customer nearby, brought over a broad leaf bamboo for Tanabata, and placed it as a decoration within the store.

The bamboo, which was very prominent, and the decorations hand made by the employees received many good comments, but after Tanabata ended, things became difficult.

It was live bamboo, so it would wither if left alone.

Before Tanabata ended, they would cut off parts of the bamboo to make mini Tanabata trees for the customers who wanted them, but a lot of bamboo was still left in the end, and Maou actually took those bamboo back to the apartment.

He had expressed that he could not throw away the bamboo trash in a place where the regular customer could see, but not only did the bamboo placed in the corridor cause a few days of inconvenience, while harboring sad feelings, Maou still had to treat the withered bamboo as flammable trash and throw it away over a few days.

“I really don’t know if the Demon King’s personality can be considered good or bad.”

“Eh?”

“To the company, is this ad-hoc adaptation considered good or bad?”

“What does that mean?”

“The things the Demon King did basically received good feedback from the customers, right? Of course, that’s because Kisaki-san helped with the negotiations.”

“Yeah…”

Emi showed a rather stern expression and sat on the chair opposite Chiho.

“But it’s not just MgRonalds, for this kind of business, other than the products, they also stick very rigidly to 『Homogeneity of Service』, right? I wonder if the actions of the Demon King can be counted as not sticking to the standards of 『Homogeneity』?”

“Ah.”

At this moment, Chiho remembered what happened when the store in front of Hatagaya Station had just started operating the MdCafe.

The coffee Kisaki made was obviously different from the coffee Maou made.

Chiho thought that it was alright as long as the coffee tasted good, but Maou had said “This means that the customers who did not drink the coffee made by Kisaki have received a product of inferior quality.”

“Do you know? Recently, the customers have been saying that the taste of the coffee made by Kisaki has worsened.”

“Eh?”

Chiho was truly shocked.

Because it was impossible for Kisaki to cut corners.

That meant…

Noticing Chiho’s expression, Emi nodded and said, “That’s right, it did not become bad, it became ‘normal,’ other than me, Akiko-san also heard the regular customers spreading this around, and at that time, I was also wondering what was going on…”

“Kisaki-san is also avoiding providing service which does not match the 『Homogeneity of Service』…?”

“It’s possible, but we can’t confirm it, right? It’s not like we can ask Kisaki-san directly. It’s just that when I think about what happened at Tanabata, and

the Demon King's performance when serving customers, I feel that the reason he is able to do so is mainly because his superior is Kisaki-san."

The hiring rate of full-time employees was not considered high, the mumblings from Kisaki just now, the coffee which had turned "normal," and Maou's work performance which might have exceeded the 『Homogeneity』.

These factors might hinder Maou from doing well in this company known as MgRonalds.

With regards on how to make profit, the company has its own considerations.

What is known as "profit," other than the numbers in the accounts, benchmarks existed in other places which could not be seen, in other words, it was a type of "trust" which does not exceed the upper or lower limits of what was expected from this business known as MgRonalds.

However, Maou and Kisaki's work performance had exceeded the upper limits of the expectations, this may damage the trust for the other branches.

They had the ability to provide better service to customers, but they had to intentionally suppress their own abilities, this appeared to be very unreasonable on the surface.

However, if they did not set this upper limit, they might cause the collapse of the expected trust level even if they did not have bad intentions, causing negative effects on others, this was an indisputable fact.

To Chiho, the greater the chances of Maou becoming a full-time employee, the greater the chances of Maou and Emi staying by her side, so this suddenly caused a shadow of uneasiness to appear in Chiho's heart; perhaps she had sensed Chiho's feelings, Emi mumbled, "I hope that he will not lose to these factors and work hard."

"Eh?"

Because Emi spoke words of support to Maou in earnest, Chiho looked up in surprise.

As if Emi saw through Chiho's questions, she nodded and replied, "Because if the Demon King becomes a full-time employee, Ente Isla can take the chance to restore fully while he's working hard here, so that he no longer has any chance to do something idiotic like conquering the world."

"Yusa-san…"

"Then I will occasionally come with Alas=Ramus when I feel like it to observe that guy's situation. To see if he's doing anything stupid or evil. Then… hm. Next year, I'm going to spend Tanabata and Christmas together with Alas=Ramus, Chiho-chan, and everyone I treasure. I don't wish to…"

At this moment, Emi got up and walked towards her cabinet.

"...Fill my days with fighting and killing anymore. I decided, though I feel bad for Alsiel, I'm going to make him cry because of two things at the same time — happy tears because the Demon King has successfully become a full-time employee, and the tears when he realizes that the demons' goal of conquering the world can no longer be fulfilled."

"…! T-That means…"

Chiho could not help but get up with enough force to push the chair over, and hugged Emi, who had taken off her shirt so she could change clothes, from behind.

"Yusa-san! Yusa-san! That means!"

"……I lost. Everything will develop as Chiho-chan wishes. This is frustrating."

Emi did not look back, and replied with a kind voice.

"I… don't plan to fight anymore."

◇

After finding out the unexpected relationship Ignora and Sataniel had with Lucifer, Chiho and the others had expressions of shock on their faces, Gabriel surveyed his audience with satisfaction and continued, “Lucifer was born only after we left our home planet, but anyway, Ignora discovered the method to achieve immortality. But that was still in the testing phases and was just ‘it seems like this can cause a person to become immortal.’ This was expected. After all, if a certain amount of time did not pass, it could not be confirmed whether someone could die because of their life span or disease. However, the fact that Ignora and the others had achieved their initial goal, successfully discovering a way to resist the endemic spreading across our home planet, still caused a huge impact on the world. Then, it was like what I said at the start, humans started to fight over the immortality technique, causing our home planet to perish.”

“W-Wait a moment! No matter what, isn’t your explanation too simplified?”

“That’s right~~ we know humans started to fight over the immortality technique~~ but how can they perish just like that~~”

“And just based on this information, it’s not enough to explain why Gabriel-san and the others are on Ente Isla’s moon right now.”

Gabriel raised both his hands, and stopped Suzuno’s, Emerada’s, and Chiho’s consecutive attacks.

“Chill chill. Of course there are various reasons for this. However, like what I said to Crestia Bell just now, all these things aren’t surprising or noble at all. The despairing consecutive chain of events only proves how idiotic humans are.”

When the endemic began to spread around the planet, during the early stages, the countries which perished first were those which did not have a mature economy or military. The citizens were not wiped out completely, but the population had decreased until the structure of the country could no longer be maintained.

They were small countries, but if many countries perished, the world economy would definitely be affected.

The large nations were busy with protecting their own economy, and when Ignora and the others were conducting research on the moon, the various countries continued to view each other as enemies, and this tense situation reached its limit in the end.

The immigrant city on the moon with Ignora as its leader would find a method to counter the endemic sooner or later, so to reap the benefits sooner, the various countries fought to provide money and talent.

Whether it was Ignora, Sataniel, Kamael, Raguel, Gabriel, Sariel, or Lailah, every one of them was born in a different country.

Therefore, the immigrant city on the moon was like a scaled down version of the world, and the people gathered there worked together to save the world.

Then, on a certain day when Ignora announced the results of the research, the large countries which supported them began to segregate themselves according to their country borders.

Firstly, the country that had sent Ignora over tried to summon her back to the ground.

Sataniel also received orders to return from his home country.

Everyone with connections to the immortality research had received orders to return to their home country.

However, from the point of view of the researchers, the immortality research had just begun, it had not reached the stage of being ready for practical use, so they could not return to their home countries now.

With Sataniel and Ignora as their representatives, the researchers continued to negotiate with their home planet, but it did not go smoothly.

Not only that, the international organization responsible for managing the immigrant city on the moon began to receive shallow-minded complaints from various places in the world.

For example, a certain country is holding researchers from my country against their will in the immigrant city on the moon.

For example, a certain country has spent spies over to steal my country's research.

For example, the spaceport which allows the people and resources from the moon to land is located in my country, so taxes have to be imposed on the research results being taken out.

Everyone was shamelessly trying to make the immortality research theirs.

During this period of time, there were some countries who forced the organizations in their country to recreate the immortality research based solely on the research paper released by either Ignora's research team or the public information released by the immigrant city.

There were also some people who believed that the large countries monopolizing the research was an unethical sin, and carried out terrorist attacks because of this.

The results of the research meant to save the all the humans in the world caused the world to descend into chaos.

However, during this time, the endemic continued to corrode the planet.

The harmful substances enveloping Gabriel's home planet would cause completely different symptoms in various parts of the human body, so when it did manifest, unless their luck was exceptionally good, there was no chance to save them at all.

The harmful substances, which mainly entered the body via the respiratory system, inhibited the absorption of nutrients when the digestive system was affected, and hampered the transmission of nerve impulses in the nervous system.

If the symptoms manifested in the lungs, oxygen absorption efficiency would decrease significantly, if the symptoms manifested in the bloodstream, the substances responsible for blood clotting could cause widespread clotting.

The probability of the symptoms manifesting varied greatly from person to person, some people could live up to a normal age even if they frequently inhaled the harmful substances, and some people could stay in a sterile environment but have the symptoms manifest in various parts of their body at the same time just from breathing in a miniscule amount of the harmful substance. The normal medical treatments immediately reached their limits.

The morbidity rate of this endemic, where the survival rate five years after the initial manifestation of the disease was less than 50%, exceeded 30% of the total population, causing the world's average life span, population dynamics, and rate of destruction to decrease.

When the immortality research started to take shape, it was a situation where humans had reached their limit, to the point that they would fight over an incomplete technique.

Even if they wanted to leave the main planet, only parts of the affluent class could migrate to the immigrant cities on the moon or other planets, and after moving there, it was not guaranteed that the harmful substances drifting in space could be avoided completely.

In fact, there were not many cases, but at the research center where Ignora and the others were stationed, some people had been afflicted with the disease, and Gabriel had activated the biochemical alarms a number of times.

Even so, when the large nations were still able to control the world's situation, the overall situation was still alright.

Using various reasons, the researchers on the moon delayed returning to their home countries, and, finally, progress was made on the immortality research.

In the research center, obstacles unrelated to knowledge and techniques increased rapidly, and as the Head of Security, Gabriel had no choice but to change the equipment for the security staff, using lethal weapons instead of suppression weapons.

Even in this situation, everyone related to the research, including Ignora, Sataniel, Lailah, and Kamael, believed that as long as their research was

completed, they could stop the meaningless conflicts of the world, so they worked tirelessly for this purpose.

They ignored the dangers of being kidnapped or attacked by spies sent by their home planet or other countries, heading to the giant tree on the other side of the moon to extract samples, they were not aiming to just achieve the goal of immortality, they were also planning methods to produce this technology.

The only thing supporting them was their determination to save all the humans from this sudden calamity which had descended from the sky.

One day, it happened.

The one who informed Gabriel was Lailah.

Ignora and Sataniel were suddenly having an intense quarrel.

When Gabriel arrived at the scene, he clearly heard one sentence.

『This child is the hope of humanity! He is the Child of Dawn who can bring light to the humans who are close to perishing!』

This sentence angered Sataniel, but Ignora disregarded this completely.

『It’s complete! It’s finally complete! I succeeded! Humanity can be saved!』

Gabriel did not know what Ignora did.

He did not know, but he understood that Ignora had made a certain conclusion related to immortality.

At this moment.

The alarm which signified that the whole immigrant city had fallen into a serious anomaly situation rang.

Gabriel, as the Head of Security, received a message from his security team in the form of their screams.

“The contents were 『Kael and Shakeenah have come! Many people were killed! Please run away, quickly!』.”


THE DEMON KING, TEMPORARILY ABSENT
4

Chapter 4: The Demon King, Temporarily Absent 4

Around the same time Emerada had taken the chance to eat dinner at MgRonalds while Emi and Chiho were on shift.

The countless pigeons resting on the unique pointed roofs of the Imperial City Ereniem were scared away by an angry shout at the same time.

“I! Hate! The people of this country!”

A large sized man rushed away from the small desk, and a huge number of documents scattered like angry fireworks.

“You’re too noisy, Alberto, actually saying this boldly in front of me, aren’t you afraid of being interrogated?”

Alberto Ende, who was proud of his overwhelmingly large stature when compared to the other comrades of the Hero, displayed fierce shouts and agile movements which reminded others of a wild carnivorous animal, a lady remained calm after seeing this scene and did not even twitch an eyebrow.

“Annoying, Heather! I hate you as well! I can’t do this anymore!”

This was not a battlefield, so the lady was wearing her usual working clothes, but this could not conceal the commanding presence which she exuded from within.

She was the young female general, Heather Lumark, the Western Continent's representative in the Five Continent Knight Alliance, and as the Commander of the Guard Knights in Saint Aire, she was the currently at the top of the military administration.

“No wonder Em doesn't want to return! Everyone in the West is gloomy and sinister!”

“What's the point of you telling me this, Acting Director of the Sorcery Management Institute, Alberto?”

Lumark's aloof response caused Alberto to shout agitatedly in response, “That's right, I am only the Acting Director! In the end, I am only the Acting Director of the Sorcery Management Institute, not the Acting Court Sorceress! But what's up with all of you and the people at the Management Institute? I can ignore it if they're saying bad things behind my back, but while standing in front of me, intentionally speaking in a volume I can hear, they said 『For something of this standard, Director Emerada would have settled it immediately』! If all of you are really that dissatisfied, it's alright, I'll leave this seat immediately! In exchange, all of you should summon that chibi broccoli immediately! It's not like I voluntarily sat on this cheapskate seat in the first place!”

“Complaining because the sorcerers said bad things about you, it appears that your spirit is unexpectedly fragile.”

With a surprised expression, Lumark looked towards Alberto, who was shouting angrily, and raised an eyebrow.

“Intentionally analyzing this in a biased way, those sorcerers and researchers in the Management Institute really don’t know much about the world at all, if you harbor the thought that paying attention to them seriously is troublesome, you probably won’t get angry.”

“I’ve passed that stage already! It’s fine if they just asked me to do things, why do I have to apply the correction stamp while those weak people tell me in a condescending tone 『It’s wrong here, this is the second time』!”

“It seems like you have accumulated a lot of stress. Then again, because the draft plan is almost due, I came here in place of the people who are so afraid of you that they can’t even approach you to chase you on the progress.”

“Huh? Are you talking about the matter mentioned by the young master from a noble family where the only magnificent thing about him was his armor? Please reconsider the standards of the Guard Knights! Even if they wear that shiny and eye-catching armor to the battlefield, it won’t be strong enough to block bullets for others, you know? The enemies might even aim for those guys and cast spells on them, causing great harm to their allies!”

“Their job is not to go on the battlefield, but to be the decorations of the Imperial City. As long as they polish their armor, which will never be attacked by blades and spears, until it can become a mirror, reflecting the sun onto the faces of the ambassadors from other countries and making the castle of the Emperor look like it’s shining, they can get their salaries.”

“Their statuses are really respectable huh? Hmm? And their salaries are higher than the people from other continents who travelled to the Central Continent to fight the remaining demons! This world has problems!”

“You’re completely correct, then does Acting Director Alberto want to be placed in the same position as them? It would definitely be very boring, you know?”

“Those guys will never realize that they’re living boring lives! If they don’t realize it, that’s good too!”

“Seriously.”

Seeing Alberto going berserk, Lumark crushed the envelope in her hand which had contained the expedite request for the draft plan, throwing it into the bin next to the desk.

Court Sorceress Emerada Etuva was the director of the Sorcery Management Institute, an official organization directly under the jurisdiction of the Emperor, and in name, it was an organization independent from the Knights.

Therefore, if there were enquiries, requests, or business from the Knights, proper documentation had to be created, in other words, Lumark created a situation where Alberto had received the expedite request and rejected it.

“Do you want to go out for a drink? To any mountain warrior of the vast expense of the Northern Continent, they would think that the Imperial Capital is too small. Do you want to leave the city as a distraction?”

“If I can straight up escape like this, I am willing to accompany you!”

“I don’t want to cause trouble for myself. So if you wanted to escape, I would probably distribute wanted posters all over the country.”

Lumark did not think that Alberto would really escape, but in the end, she still brought Alberto to her office.

“Such an unromantic invite.”

“Sometimes just being a woman is enough to become a weakness. I don’t like the people in my country that much either.”

Heather Lumark’s office could only be described as plain and simple, and no femininity could be felt from it at all.

Even the various parts of her ceremonial armor were polished to a blade-like brightness.

“I obtained a rare wine recently, but the appearance of this wine made me unable to recommend it to the people who love expensive wines too much. Just based on this, if it’s the comrade of the Hero who wandered all over the world, I won’t have such concerns.”

“Ugoh.”

Lumark took a bottle hidden deep within the bookshelf and Alberto’s eyes widened in surprise.

“This is wine from the Southern Continent, right?”

“So you know about this.”

In the simply designed large wine bottle, a strange but familiar looking lizard was immersed inside.

“This appears to be a secret wine, with its brewing method known only by the royalty of the desert kingdoms. Have you drunk this before?”

“I didn’t know that this could be made into wine. When the wine is finished, we have to cut the lizard inside into chunks, sprinkle spices on it, and make barbecued skewers. It’s delicious.”

The wine, poured into a silver flat-bottomed cup, was of a pale golden color and gave off a strong alcoholic smell; Alberto swished a mouthful of it without any hesitation and realized that the texture was unexpectedly mild, this taste which appeared to warm the body from the throat to the stomach might end up being very addictive.

“It’s not bad.”

“Right?”

Without any hesitation, Lumark poured the expensive wine into Alberto’s cup which had been emptied.

“So, did Emerada say anything else?”

“Huh?”

“It’s impossible for her to irresponsibly extend her stay in the foreign world, right?”

"That's hard to say, I feel that not wanting to miss out on delicious food is her true intention, it seems like a festival similar to the celebrations commemorating the birth of Christ is taking place there, and there are many kinds of food which can only be eaten during that period."

As if Alberto wanted to carefully savor the taste with his tongue, he drank in small mouthfuls this time.

"Does that mean that there are other reasons besides her true intentions?"

"Yeah."

Alberto sat on the sofa directly though no one had invited him to sit on it.

"Emilia seems to want to attend university, which is a school over there, of course, so she wants to support Emilia."

"Oh."

Lumark's eyes widened in happiness.

"Female commoners can study at higher institutions of learning in Japan huh."

In Saint Aire, only males from noble families could study at higher institutions of learning such as a university.

While they did not differentiate between status on the surface, in reality, the Theological Seminary who opened its holy doors to all citizens, was used to accept the sons of the nobles who were unable to study at university.

Because many people who only had their family status to brag about were gathered there, rumors had spread among the people that if a commoner accidentally got mixed inside, only a hard life would await them.

“They don’t seem to impose limits on lineage and status, but on the contrary, money will be needed.”

“I see. Since it’s in a foreign world, it will be impossible to provide assistance from here (Saint Aire).”

“Even if it’s possible to exchange money, I don’t think Emilia would accept any assistance from here (Saint Aire).”

Alberto spoke as he looked at the surface of the liquid in the wine cup which gave off a pleasant smell.

“That’s true. Just having ‘Hero Emilia’ owe you a favor would be enough for a person to gain an advantage in any situation related to Ente Isla. Emilia

might never return here again because she feels that it would be troublesome.”

Lumark swirled the wine cup which gave off an overpowering aroma and said this with a smile.

“You seem very happy.”

“Of course, because I don’t wish for Emilia to come back either.”

Alberto painfully understood Lumark’s true intentions hidden behind that smile.

“News of the incident at Azure Sky Canopy seems to have spread around much sooner than expected.”

The incident at Azure Sky Canopy referred to the news that Hero Emilia and Demon General Alsiel were still alive.

“Of course, Emilia and Alsiel are not in Ente Isla right now, but too many people have seen them. Information might become vaguer as it spreads further, but no matter how diluted a wine gets, there will be bartenders who can see through it to reach the truth.”

“Even so, not many people would think of a foreign world as the answer, right?”

“It’s hard to say that they won’t be any, demons and angels really exist after all.”

Lumark was a devout follower of the Holy Church, but she was not so idiotic and blind to believe that everything in the world was related to God.

“Even if Emilia returns here, she will not obtain happiness. If the Knights help to control the flow of information, it might be possible for her to restore Sloan Village, but no matter what controls are implemented, there will be flaws in the end. Right now, as long as the name Emilia Justina exists, sacrifices cannot be avoided.”

Hero Emilia was born in Sloan Village of Saint Aire. Based on this, ever since Emilia got rid of Lucifer and was seen as the savior of the world, Saint Aire frequently used Emilia’s name to gain an advantageous position over other countries in politics, economy, and military.

When going against the Demon King Army, the common enemy of the humans, Saint Aire could at least still maintain their position that they were forced to be the first one to bear the brunt of it and was the country with the most sacrifices.

But in the current times, when the common enemy of the world had disappeared, things were different.

Even if they successfully let people from other countries and continents know that Emilia was a citizen of Saint Aire, this time Saint Aire was waging a political war with regards to Emilia's treatment and affiliation.

Sloan Village was considered a satellite town of Cassius City, but there was a noble lord who ruled over Cassius City, Sloan Village, and the neighboring villages.

The previous marquis was part of Knight Pepin Magnus's faction, and when Pepin lost power after the "Azure Sky Canopy Incident," he lost this position as well.

However, this did not mean that the marquis' family were cut off.

It was only Pepin's faction which disappeared from the surface of the stage, there were still many relatives and in-laws who could inherit the marquis' family.

Some of them were very influential locally and in other countries, so if the marquis' family was cut off just like that, it would cause a lot of resentment from other nobles and the lower ranked nobles located within the marquis' territory.

Therefore, the family of the Cassius Marquis was currently managed by someone within the family, chosen because he sided with Lumark, allowing the family to survive and continue; the sins of the previous generation were also written off.

Because of this situation, even if Emilia wanted to return to Sloan Village and lead a peaceful life, the fact that the strongest human in existence was there was enough to allow the current generation Cassius Marquis to obtain an overwhelming influence within the country.

It was still alright if they only wanted to use her reputation, but some low ranked nobles would not hesitate to make use of Emilia's dignity as a female just to gain influence over the Cassius Marquis and Lumark, the one supporting him, or even the Emperor of Saint Aire.

Simply put, within Saint Aire, there were definitely people who wanted to marry Emilia to raise the profile of their family.

Then, with Emilia's personality, she would definitely be unwilling to become a political tool.

"Like this, she can only be like me and be single for the rest of her life."

"I heard that the prince really wants Heather Lumark's reputation, you know?"

“I won’t be like a young girl and say things like not needing any men who do not wish to court me for who I am and not my status, but I am confident that I will never fall in love with those useless big shots who only know how to polish their armor.”

“This is not something which can be solved with just an inquiry. Insulting royalty would probably be a death sentence.”

Alberto also admired Lumark’s frank and outspoken personality.

“If Emilia fell in love with a commoner, that man would probably die a mysterious death. But if she married into a noble family, she would voluntarily throw herself into a political war. Those armor polishing big shots are not worth mentioning at all.”

“Heroes can only live within legends?”

“Or else live in a world where no one knows that she is a Hero.”

Lumark capped the lizard wine and hid it in the bookshelf once again.

“Talking about what I can do for her now, I can only hope that she will not regret saving Ente Isla.”

“She’s not that petty.”

“Some things which one does not realize when they are young will only be made clear when they become an adult.”

Lumark, who looked young, had actually experienced many years such that it would not be strange even if she was given a key position in the country.

Compared to Emerada, Lumark was closer to Alberto’s age.

Because of this, with regards to making a young lady, more than ten years younger than her, carry a burden of not just a country, but the whole world, the guilt Lumark felt was even stronger than what was felt by Emilia.

But because of the distance between Lumark and Emilia, and issues related to her duties, she rarely showed this.

“Even so, if I could create a world where Emilia could live happily, I would be willing to do anything… but she probably doesn’t expect me to do this, I am probably just one of the people in power who is always looking for an opportunity to make use of her.”

Lumark’s gaze lowered in a rather lonely manner, and Alberto smiled evilly, “Don’t worry. Emilia does not have to worry about the limitations here while in Japan, and she already has someone who can listen to her complaints, the current you cannot do anything for her at all.”

"Hmph… as a reference, who are you talking about?"

"Huh?"

Lumark stared at Alberto curiously, and a short while later, Alberto realized what she wanted him to say and sighed.

I'm not going to fall for your trap.

"A young girl called Chiho Sasaki, and a lady called Rika Suzuki. The two of them are Emilia's comrades at work. And Crestia Bell, for someone from the Church, she is a very reasonable lady. The best thing about her is that she will not use God to pressure others into complying."

"Haah—"

Alberto's answer caused Lumark to frown deeply, and she said disdainfully without masking her expression, "Boring! What the heck is this!"

"What!?"

"Because of this, that's why the people of the Sorcery Management Institute are saying bad things about you. I have already treated you to alcohol, can't you entertain me a little?"

This was really too unreasonable.

“No matter what I do, I will always be scolded when it’s time to be scolded. If so, it would be better to do things in a way which avoids the accumulation of stress.”

“Hmph, I don’t know if you have been influenced by Emerada, but overly intuitive guys are boring too.”

“Regardless of how intuitive I am, it is at least better than a woman who loves complaining.”

“I see, it looks like the two of us are the type to lead happier lives when we remain single for the rest of our lives.”

“The nomads of the North do not stay in a fixed location in the first place. Thanks for your good wine, I will prioritize the request for expedition from just now as a form of repayment.”

After leaving the office belonging to Lumark, who kept complaining, Alberto obediently began his journey back to the Sorcery Management Institute.

On the way back, Alberto repeatedly gazed at the scenery within the holy city through the windows, and thought that although the people were living simple lives, how did the world become so complicated?

“…No good, no good, it’s not as if I became drunk because I drank good wine.”

Originally, to Emilia, Saint Aire was not a particularly difficult place to live in.

Not just Sloan Village, there must have been various places around the world where Emilia could hide her identity and live in, if Emilia became famous in Japan, Japan would probably place certain restrictions on the way she lived her life.

“That Demon King seems to be living a free life there.”

Alberto had met many demon enemies, and especially after making contact and understanding the personality of Adramelech, who had suppressed the Northern Continent in the past, he realized that the demons were not unreasonable animals.

Demons had a demon society, and the King of Demons must have been imposed with a certain number of shackles.

However, there was a decisive difference in Demon King Satan’s and Hero Emilia’s starting points in Japan.

Satan had appeared in Ente Isla as a king, and escaped to Japan as a king.

On the other hand, Emilia had become a Hero against her will, and had drifted to Japan on her own fulfill her responsibilities while being admired as a Hero.

Satan did not fulfill his ambition to conquer the world, but he was still walking on the path by his own will.

Emilia had fulfilled her wish of world peace, but she was walking this path against her will.
It was not clear if Emerada had noticed this difference, but from how Emerada wanted to support the path Emilia had chosen, somewhere deep within her feelings for doing this, she must have felt this unshakable truth.

Alberto had frequently heard many people say that they have found a completely different ideal on the path they did have expectations for, but if they wanted Emilia to live a happy life in the future, perhaps this was the only way to survive.

Just as Lumark said, in the current Ente Isla, there was nowhere Emilia could belong.

With the existence of her name alone, someone would definitely be harmed.

“So it’s better for her to stay in Japan, pretend to be a Hero, and continue to bicker with the Demon King.”

This was also rather funny.

This world owed Emilia a huge favor, so helping her to fulfill a wish as a repayment should not be considered too much, right?

Why was this world unable to survive if they did not make use of Hero Emilia?

“Even so, we cannot let it die just like that.”

They just had to make it such that the world would not overly rely on Emilia.

While Emilia and the Demon King were staying in Japan, Ente Isla should have achieved this.

“Just like a child who was left to watch home and then acted spoiled once their parents returned.”

If the Demon King and Hero continued to be away, Ente Isla should be able to just barely regulate itself.

However, once a reliable guardian returned, the world would return to being a child which could not control its own desires.

If the Demon King returned as well, it would really become “a hopeless world.”

Unfortunately, the “God” who should have become the humans’ support at this kind of time was currently very suspicious.

Just like how the news of Emilia’s and Alsiel’s return was leaked to various parts of the world, the huge betrayal of the humans done by Olba Meyer — one of the Six Archbishops, the highest power of authority in the Theocracy — gradually spread as well.

Other than via the management level of the Church, this information spread to various parts of the world through Pepin’s faction which was linked to Olba and the people around the influential people of the Eastern Continent, who had attracted the demons to their country under Olba’s instructions.

“Peacetime is so troublesome. War is so much simpler.”

During the time Alberto was mumbling to himself, he returned to the melancholic Director’s Office of the Management Institute, and picked up the expedite request which had been thrown in the bin by Lumark.

“Uh~ let’s see? With regards to the request to dispatch researchers to measure the holy magic concentration around the holy sites… ah, there seems to be something like that. I remember all the documents related to the Church are around here…”

In the pile of documents which Alberto had decided to postpone the processing of a few days back, he found a matching request document.

“Yeah, that’s right. Asking us to dispatch thirty researchers was too much, which was why I decided to put it aside. This is a joke, this place is already shorthanded, and they’re still so shameless as to throw the Church related cases over to Emerada (the Sorcery Management Institute) to handle.”

The project seemed to have planned to dispatch people to the Theocracy’s Headquarters and holy land — Saint Ignord — to investigate the sources of springs where holy water could be collected.

The holy water of Saint Ignord contained a rich amount of holy magic, so not only was it for ceremonial use, the Church hospital would use it for healing, but the quality of the spring had recently decreased.

Ever since Emerada was taken to the strange trial, the relations between the Church and the Sorcery Management Institute had soured greatly, but because the Church had a close connection to Saint Ignord, an incident like that was not enough to cause a crack huge enough for the two to cut their ties with each other.

However, amongst the researchers in the Management Institute, there were still many people who disliked the Church because of what happened with

Emerada. If Alberto accepted a request from the Church when Emerada was not around, the number of people criticizing him would definitely increase.

“Haaaaah… Em, please come back quickly…”

The declining quality of holy water would affect the citizens’ lives directly, furthermore, the prestige of the Church could decrease significantly.

If the Sorcery Management Institute — or Saint Aire — could solve the issue which even the Theological Seminary was unable to solve, this was an opportunity for the other party to owe them a favor, so all they could do was to find a way to motivate themselves.

“Then again, the concentration of holy magic decreased significantly huh… did the groundwater routes change because of a collapse or something?”

While Alberto was feeling perplexed about this, he stamped a seal of approval with his position as the Acting Director of the Sorcery Management Institute, then created a delivery order.

◇

“Kael and Shakeenah’s goal was to get rid of the immortality technology. They destroyed the information and equipment related to the immortality technology one after another. The normal security staff were not their match at all. Sataniel, Kamael, and I formed the last line of defence to suppress

them, it was a fierce battle. If Sataniel, who understood their genetic structure, was not around, I would have died at that time," Gabriel said shakily.

This was the first time Chiho had seen the expression of "fear" on the archangel who could still show a nonchalant expression even when he was facing down the Demon King and Hero at the same time.

"That Kael-san and Shakeenah-san helped with Ignora's research in the past right? Why did they suddenly…?"

"They underestimated Ignora's power, they had never expected that their assistance would cause Ignora to develop this amazing technology known as immortality. They had thought that at most, the research would only progress to a simpler stage, which would be the method to counter the endemic. However, the immortality technology which Ignora discovered in the end was a 'human crisis' which the Sephirah children could not ignore."

The Sephirah could interfere with human history when humanity encountered a crisis which could not be solved with just human power.

And the research to counter the endemic hitting a bottleneck was unquestionably a human crisis.

However, because the Sephirah interfered, it had caused the humans to face a crisis known as "obtaining immortality."

“The reasoning is simple, if humans become unable to die naturally, how will the world turn out?”

Population boom, food shortage, territorial disputes.

These simple situations flashed through the mind of Chiho and the others.

“If humans wish to create history, they cannot overcome death.”

If all humans become immortal, the world will collapse.

Kael and Shakeenah did not assist Ignora for such a reason.

Therefore, they started a battle to eliminate this human crisis.

“However, at the end of the fierce battle, Sataniel and Kamael won. This may have been something which could only be done by the two of them who were familiar with Kael and Shakeenah’s DNA structure… but with this alone, it still brought misfortune to Ente Isla.”

The research center on the moon managed to push back the Sephirah children, but when the news of this crisis faced by the research center was learned by their planet, the information had mutated.

In short, every country judged that a certain country had attacked the moon because they wanted the results for themselves.

Thus, an endless war began.

The various countries started to send troops to the moon using the excuse of protecting their country's scientists.

However, those armies kept getting into conflict on land, in the sky, space, and even the moon, killing each other.

After the research center and the immigrant city on the moon achieved their research goal, they were faced with this unimaginable situation, so they made a decision.

That would be to separate from the surface of the moon.

If the research center was taken apart by the armies of the various nations, the immortality technology which they had developed after putting in so much effort would be lost.

The many countries on their planet had already lost their composure, no matter what the research center on the moon said, all of their research would come to naught.

Ignora and the others abandoned their planet.

As the person in charge of the security team, Gabriel allowed part of the immigrant city and research center to escape to space.

Each satellite immigrant city could be used as mobile spaceships during an emergency.

This was a rule set when they started to move towards space, a measure put in place to prevent certain countries from monopolizing them, but no one expected that in the end, this feature would be used to escape from the countries on the home planet.

The armies from the various countries could only stare as they watched the research center leave the surface of the moon.

If they attacked carelessly, they would lose the immortality technology.

Any country that did this would definitely be eliminated by the combined attacks from the other countries in the world.

"However, even after doing this much, the various countries on the planet did not stop their wars."

Lailah shook her head sadly.

“The only thing that changed was all the countries sending us commands such as ‘Don’t run,’ ‘Return to the country,’ like they did not know what was going on. In the end, they did not understand what we were trying to run away from.”

Ignora had lost all hope in the planet and decided that all the immigrant cities on the moon should leave the planet’s orbit.

“As the distance between the planet and the moon gradually increased, the holy magic scanner picked up an abnormal reaction. We used a super long distance optical telescope and captured an image of that withered giant tree slowly leaving the moon.”

『Humanity has ended.』

『Sorry, Daath.』

At the end of the fierce battle, the figures of the captured Kael and Shakeenah disappeared without anyone taking notice after they said these sentences.

Using the long distance scanner, with Ignora in the lead, the people of the city on the moon and the research center discovered that the immigrant cities and the main cities on the planet had been destroyed.

This was something which had happened ten years after they escaped the planet and were drifting on the outer edges of the solar system.

Ignora and the other immigrants in the immigrant cities, who had lost their support so easily, drifted across space for such a long time that even thinking about those times would make one feel dizzy.

“All of you should have guessed it already, right? In the end, we drifted to the moon of Ente Isla. According to our information database, the holy magic scanner captured the same waves as the giant tree which grew on the opposite side of our moon.”

“That is…!”

Emi sucked in a breath, and Lailah nodded heavily.

“Near that place, there was a planet which was exactly the same as our home planet. We chose that place as our second home. However, the Ente Isla at that time, only had one moon.”



CONTINUED THE HIGH SCHOOL GIRL AND OFFICE LADY, WELCOMING THE NEW YEAR TOGETHER

Continuing Chapter: The High School Girl and Office Lady, Welcoming the New Year Together

"Why… why did things, end up like this?"

Rika moaned after listening to what Chiho said, disturbing the cold air in Room 201 which had turned into an empty shell.

"Didn't everyone want to celebrate Christmas for Alas=Ramus-chan's sake!? Forget everything related to Emi's mother and the others! Forget about fighting, ignoring Heaven and the people of Ente Isla, treasuring the life they have now. Then, why!?"

With an emotionless side profile, Chiho calmly replied to all of Rika's questions.

"The Christmas party... did not take place in the end."

"Eh…"

"The person who returned first... was Emerada-san, then Suzuno-san, then Yusa-san and Alas=Ramus-chan, Nord-san and Lailah-san followed behind them, and lastly, Maou-san, Ashiya-san, Urushihara-san, and Acies. This happened on the 26th."

“The 26th, wasn’t that one of the dates proposed to hold the Christmas party…”

“The 23rd was a holiday, so the Christmas party was planned for that day. Considering that Suzuki-san might attend, it would be better to hold it on a holiday. However, before the 23rd, Maou-san and the others had decided to return to Ente Isla. So by the 26th, everyone had already…”

“Leaving Chiho-chan alone?”

“…Yes.”

“T-That’s too cruel! Not holding the party which everyone had decided on, can they still be considered friends?”

“This can’t be helped. Not everything could be controlled. Everything was overturned with just one sentence. Even Urushihara-san decided to participate in the battle because of that sentence.”

“How can this… everyone had their own thoughts and their own desires, why…”

Chiho, with a stiff expression, smiled thinly, “Once those words were said, no one could win against them.”

“Chiho-chan…”

Even Chiho, who was mentally stronger than her and had spent more time with the foreign visitors, had given up so easily, what had happened?

Rika did not have a clue about it at all.

“Lailah-san was very surprised as well. After all, Maou-san and Yusa-san, who had been so stubborn, said that they would agree to her request, she even confirmed it a few times together with Gabriel-san. It wasn’t just Maou-san and Yusa-san. Lailah-san and Gabriel-san also confirmed with me, Ashiya-san, Urushihara-san, Suzuno-san, Emerada-san, and Nord-san, asking 『Is this really alright?』 But I could only reply, 『It’s fine.』 I wasn’t just simply going along with the others, I was really only able to answer this way.”

Chiho did not resist this, surprising Rika a lot.

“This thing was really that serious?”

“Of course, I cannot choose to fight alongside them… because I’m too weak.”

The cooled air in the room dyed Chiho’s breath white as she sighed.

“I’m really sorry for informing Suzuki-san this late.”

“…This can’t be helped. I wasn’t prepared to meet Emi and Ashiya-san, and my hometown was in a mess, so I was staying there before and after the New Year… but… but, I see, they left already huh. I even sent Emi a New Year’s card too.”

Because she remembered that Emi had forgotten to send a New Year’s card last year, after many years of not doing so, Rika sent a New Year’s card from her hometown in Kobe to Emi’s apartment.

However, that New Year’s card must be in the letterbox at Urban Heights Eifuku, shivering because of the cold at the beginning of the year.

“Next time… when can we meet them again? Could it be that we will never see them again?”

“…Erm.”

“Hey… they’re going to defeat God, defeat that person called Ignora, right? That would take a lot of time, right? However, it’s not like that they have to fight everyday, right? There should be days when they can return?”

“I don’t know. At that time, I did not know what everyone would encounter once they reached the other side. So…”

Chiho stood up weakly.

Rika, who could not stand up, was still kneeling on the tatami.

She was unable to accept reality.

No, this was reality in the first place.

People who should not have existed returned to the place from which they came by their own will, whether it was Rika or Chiho, they had no right to stop them.

This world did not have a man named Maou Sadao in the first place.

This world did not have a woman named Yusa Emi in the first place.

Right now, everyone had returned to their original forms and returned to their original world.

“So…”

“Original world…”

“I won’t acknowledge this, I cannot wait that long.”

Chiho spoke with a dry voice which was completely different from before, and Rika, whose heart was controlled by an emptiness due to knowing that the “original world” did not exist, could not help but look up at the girl.

“Not knowing how long it will take, not even knowing if they will come back alive, I cannot quietly wait for that kind of war to end.”

After Chiho said this angrily, she suddenly unwrapped the scarf covering her mouth and threw it on the tatami.

“Chi, Chiho-chan?”

Not just that.

Chiho put down the bag she was carrying, roughly took off the coat she was wearing, then she ran to the porch to put on her shoes, and, holding Rika’s shoes, she returned, stepping on the tatami directly.

“Chiho-chan? What are you doing?”

“Suzuki-san! Here! Please put these on!”

“P-Put them on here, eh? W-Wait a moment, please don’t lose yourself in despair……”

“I really cannot tolerate it anymore this time. I can’t wait, I can’t continue to wait, isn’t that so, Suzuki-san!?”

“E-Ehh?”

Chiho shook Rika with so much force that it seemed like she could lift Rika up any moment.

“Maou-san never gave me an answer in the end, you know? I’ve liked him since so long ago, and earlier, he had said that he would tell me if he found an answer, but he completely forgot about it so quickly, and ran to that place because of that one sentence! How long should I wait!? Don’t you think he should at least tell me when he will answer!? I like Maou-san so much too!!”

“Huh? Eh? Ehh?”

“Suzuki-san is the same too, right? You haven’t heard an answer from Ashiya-san yet, right? Is it really alright to continue like this? It’s not, isn’t it? You want an answer too, right!?”

“Eh? A-Answer? Y-You mean the answer to the confession? Eh, but earlier, I…”

“Has Ashiya-san said that he hates Suzuki-san?”

“Ehh? What?”

“Has he talked about liking, hating, wanting to date, not wanting to date, continue being friends, or not wanting to meet? He didn’t say such things, right? Didn’t Suzuki-san cry? Since he already did that much, why didn’t he just say that he doesn’t want to see you!? Those people are always~~ like this! That might be them acting kind, but if they act this way every time, the things which can be accepted will end up being unacceptable! What is said is true, right? Ashiya-san went over there without stating his feelings clearly, you know? Don’t you feel frustrated about this?”

“Uh, erm, how should I say this?”

“If he can’t start a relationship with you, he should say it clearly! That kind of method where he does not have to say anything and have you give up on your own is too sly! Maou-san too, regardless of how much time has passed, he will only say ‘I don’t know, I don’t know,’ who’s the one who doesn’t know!?”

“C-C-Calm down a little, Chiho-chan, eh? What’s wrong with you? Why are you so…!?”

“I have already decided, I’m going to graduate from the obedient ‘Chi-chan’ who would only stay in my room alone while waiting for the people important to me to return! So!”

Chiho let go of Rika as she let out an angry shout and gently placed her hand on the edge of the tatami in the middle of Room 201.

“Ughhhhhhhh!”

“Chi, Chiho-chan? What are you doing?”

“I’m taking the tatami apart, please help me!”

“A-Alright!”

After the clueless Rika helped Chiho, the two of them lifted the tatami easily.

Though they had successfully lifted the tatami, Rika still did not know Chiho’s reason for doing so.

There was only an ordinary floor underneath that tatami.

There was nothing hidden below.

However, Rika discovered something strange.

That place was abnormally clean.

There would normally be a layer of dust under the tatami, or stains or cracks. However, that place was so clean, it was as if it had been polished before.

“We cannot fight,” Chiho said determinedly. “We cannot fly, cannot swing a sword, cannot produce flames, will die if we fall from a high place, and we cannot fix a broken expressway… but, I can cook!”

“Ehh?”

“I know what Maou-san, Yusa-san, Ashiya-san, Urushihara-san, Suzuno-san, and Alas=Ramus-chan like and dislike to eat! I can clean, and will learn how to sew! When everyone feels frustrated, I can listen to them rant! As long as I have my mobile phone, I can use Idea Link too! I can confidently say that I am already such good friends with the people who gather in Room 201 that we can relax around each other! So!”

Then, Chiho took that thing out from her pocket.

The object which was so thin and small that Chiho could hold it in her hand let out a faint glow, Chiho raised that object in the air and swung it towards the floor.

At that instant.

“Uwah!”

Rika could not help but cover her face.

The floor made of meranti wood glowed suddenly and the oil-film-like surface started to wobble.

The glow grew stronger and stronger, causing Rika to close her eyes.

“Chi, Chiho-chan, this is?”

“Please wait a while. The surface of the boundary will stabilize soon and connect with that side.”

“C-Connect… uwah?”

When the last particularly strong flash of light illuminated the whole room, the strong light suddenly settled.

“You can open your eyes now.”

“W-What is this…?”

Rika, who put her hands down because of Chiho’s prompt, widened her eyes in surprise after seeing the change in what used to be the floor.

There was a luminous spring made from a mix of white and blue lights.

In the middle of the remaining five tatami mats which had been worn down by the sun, a holy luminous spring suddenly appeared, Rika no longer knew how to describe this extremely comical looking scene.

“Suzuki-san should have seen it once before, at Ueno.”

“Ueno… ah!”

After understanding Chiho’s words, Rika realized this with a start.

“I remember Suzuno-chan, at the Gate of Hell… then, is this…”

“That’s right.”

Chiho nodded and replied in a shaky voice.

“This is a ‘Gate.’ Connecting different worlds, a magic tunnel which can cross the sea of stars.”

In the past, Maou and Suzuno opened a path heading to the foreign world at Unenooshi Park to save Emi and Ashiya.

“We’re going.”

“Eh?”

When Rika came back to her senses, Chiho already had grasped her hand and said this.

Without anyone noticing, Chiho had already picked up the bag she had put down earlier, swung Rika’s shoulder bag on her shoulder, and looked straight at the luminous spring under the tatami.

“Eh, wait a moment, eh? You said go, where are we going?”

“Suzuki-san, do you normally get car sick? During my first time, I got serious motion sickness, so I bought motion sickness pills. If you don’t mind, you can take them on the way.”

“On the way, eh? A transportation tool? Chi, Chiho-chan, what are you saying? Seriously, where are we going now…”

“We’re going!”

“Where are we goingggggggggggggggg?”

When she came to her senses, exerting strength unexpected for her size, Chiho had already pulled Rika into the luminous spring.

The location which should have logically been the floor suddenly changed into a bottomless space with nowhere to stand on, and the fear of having been thrown into the air gripped Rika's heart.

After the seemingly endless fall ended, Rika, having closed her eyes and tensed up completely, sensed someone gently patting her shoulder.

She had thought that she was falling, but there was no sensation of hitting the ground at all.

And she did not sense any wind pressure which would be generated when falling.

After nervously opening her eyes, the scene which entered Rika's eyes was a holographic scene which she had seen in photos or videos, something no normal person would ever personally witness.

『It's fake, right?』

That was the Earth.

The massive blue planet was in front of Rika.

Feeling that she was floating in space, the scene Rika saw suddenly moved away rapidly.

The light of the Earth, Moon, and Sun gradually became distant, and her surroundings turned into a light tunnel formed by twisting luminance.

『This way. Please come with me.』

『Chi, Chiho-chan!』

The person who touched Rika from behind was Chiho.

Chiho, who was carrying her own bag and Rika's shoulder bag, waved at Rika and walked in a certain direction along the tunnel of light.

Watching her back, it was as if she was flying through the air.

Chiho's hands and feet did not move, she was just staring towards the direction she wanted to move.

Rika, who realized that Chiho was getting further away, frantically planned to catch up to Chiho.

Just thinking about it caused Rika's brain to register the feeling that her body was moving forward in the space.

She thought, *Could all this be a dream?*

Everything was a dream, when she woke up, she would return to the world where Sasazuka existed, where Emi and Ashiya were.

However—

『If you don't feel well, please use this.』

Chiho, who flew beside her, passed her a barf bag and anti-motion sickness medicine, and after touching them, these things did not give off a feeling that she was in a dream.

『Chiho-chan! Erm, ignore these things first, what is…』

Rika finally said the question she had been thinking about, but Chiho's answer only confused her more.

『This is the interior of a 'gate.' We are currently flying in the tunnel opened by the 'gate.'』

『F-Flying?』

『It'll take some time. If you feel nauseous, please tell me, okay? I was like this during my first time.』

『Time? Eh? What did you say just now? This is a ‘gate,’ the ‘gate’ is in space?』

『It’s because this is a spell connecting different worlds. We are currently flying away from the Earth, heading towards another world.』

『W-Where exactly are we going?』

『Isn’t it obvious?』

This was the first time Rika had felt that Chiho’s kind smile was scary.

『Of course it’s the world where our favorite people are at.』

After Rika regained consciousness, she smelled a familiar scent.

It was Mat Rush, this was the smell of tatami.

“Eh… I…”

Rika opened her eyes slightly, and within her blurred vision, she discovered the familiar sight of tatami.

"…I was, dreaming after all?"

That was a strange dream. A dream where she was strolling in the universe with Chiho.

A dream where there was a gate leading to a foreign world underneath the tatami in Villa Rosa Sasazuka Room 201, and they flew away from the Earth after jumping into that place.

"Hmm… hmm?"

At this moment, Rika discovered that she had strangely sweated a lot.

This place was hot. The indoor temperature was very high.

"Strange? I remember Maou-san's home did not have any heating…"

As her blurred vision from just waking up started to clear—

"……Ugh?"

—a wave of fear rose up within Rika's heart.

There was tatami under her right now.

However, this did not look like the tatami from Room 201 of Villa Rosa Sasazuka.

“Eh…… ehhh?”

If Rika knew the term “Daigaran,”[4] this was the space she was in now.

A hard floor so wide that it felt endless. When she looked up, she could only see a pitch-black ceiling. There were many rows of huge beams which reminded her of an ancient primeval forest, and even the thing next to her which looked like an altar was as tall as a small hill.

The mysterious material which created this spacious and solemn space which echoed Rika’s voice did not look like stone, brick, or earth, and for reasons unknown, there were signs of damage everywhere.

Upon careful examination, there were a number of pits in the floor, and some pillars were very badly damaged.

Regardless of how she thought about it, Rika could not understand why there were six tatamis laid in this place which could only be described as an ancient ruin or temple, and why she was sleeping here.

“Eh, this is?”

As Rika, who was having difficulty recovering from her shock, looked around in a dazed manner, she noticed that other than herself, there were other things within the six tatami space she was in.

“This is from Maou-san’s home…”

Like the tatami, this was a familiar object.

A cheap kotatsu which looked like it had been used for a long time.

“Wha… What is……?”

“Huh?”

At this moment, within this space which lacked any sense of reality, a sound which did not originate from Rika was heard.

Rika, who could not tell which direction the sound originated from due to the large venue, surveyed her surroundings once more.

Then, the sound of two hard objects making contact with one another was heard from far away.

A short while later, that sound materialized into a figure Rika was familiar with, panting in front of her.

“I’m glad, Rika, you’re awake.”

“Emi…”

The person who came was Rika’s good friend, Yusa Emi.

The other party was wearing foreign clothing which Rika had never seen before, but her face, hair, eyes, and voice definitely belonged to Emi.

“Emi, this place is…”

“Sorry! I left without saying anything!”

“Wapuh.”

Emi did not answer Rika’s question and hugged her, showing an expression like she was going to cry.

“Because I rushed back on a short notice, I had no time to notify you. I wanted to make a return trip to explain, but there were so many things taking up my time, so I kept pushing it back… it’s already past New Year’s now. I’m really sorry!”

“Oh… yeah, erm.”

As Rika thought about unimportant things like, *This smell is that of Emi's favorite shampoo,* she asked in a dazed manner, "Where is this place? Why is Maou-san's kotatsu in such a strange place?"

"…Ah, that's right. Rika still doesn't know anything!"

Emi frantically let Rika go, clapped once and said, "Then again, do you feel hot? Take off your coat first. It's winter right now, but the latitude is low here, so the temperature is high.

"Eh? Oh, yeah."

After listening to Emi's suggestion and taking off her coat, the apparent temperature Rika felt finally decreased with the release of the hot air.

"Can you stand? Ah, please put these on first. The floor here is ice cold."

After saying this, Emi placed a pair of sandals which looked like they were made from leather on the edge of the tatami.

"Erm, Emi, I jumped into the area underneath the tatami in Maou-san's home."

"I heard it from Chiho-chan, she seems to have forcefully brought you here without explaining anything."

"Ah, uh, yeah. Erm, I'm probably not dreaming, right?"

"About that, I do feel as if I am dreaming."

Emi, holding Rika's hand and walking across the Daigaran, showed a happy heartfelt smile.

"Because I always wished that one day, I could bring Rika to visit my hometown."

"Emi's… hometown?"

In the end, the two of them reached the edge of the Daigaran.

There was a window which looked like it was dug out from the wall directly, Rika, who looked out of the window, thought in an airheaded manner, *So the sky here is blue too.*

"Saying this might make some people angry… but I feel that the scenery seen from here is the best."

"Oh."

Under Emi’s prompting, Rika placed her hands on the window sill and looked outside.

Emi announced from beside her.



“Rika. Welcome to the Continents of the Holy Cross, Ente Isla.”

That window was located at a very high location.

The cloudless blue sky extended to the horizon, the grasslands far below her feet spread outwards, and within her field of vision, it changed to forests, roads, swamps, and lakes, continuously extending outwards.

The birds flying in the sky were a type of large wild fowl which definitely did not exist in Japan.

“…Wow.”

Rika stared at this scenery in a stunned manner, completely engrossed.

The distance between herself and the ground was so large that the Kobe Port Tower and Kyoto Tower could not compare.

A lot of people had gathered on the ground.

She did not know if she was imagining things because she was so far from the ground, some of the humans seemed to move like animals, but Rika felt

that some of the movements she had seen did not resemble any of the animals she had seen before, bearing closer resemblance to mechanical objects.

“Erm…… Emi, just now, you…”

“Hmm?”

“Where did you say this was again?”

“Ente Isla.”

“Eh?”

“The Central City of the Central Continent of Ente Isla. The ruins of the old Isla Kentorum.”

“Eh? Eh? Eh?”

“There’s no sense of reality?”

Realizing that Rika’s reaction was a little slow, Emi asked this, and just like a puppet with its strings cut, Rika nodded once.

“Then let’s go down to take a look. I’m sorry, but since it takes a whole day to go down, let’s go down from here.”

“Eh? From here? To where?”

“To the ground, of course. After speaking to the people down there, you will probably have a better grasp on the situation. Excuse me.”

“Eh… wah!”

The next moment, Emi had already used her slender arms to pick Rika up in a princess carry.

Her build was similar to Rika’s, yet Emi was able to pick up an adult woman easily, it was only now that it truly occurred to Rika that Emi was truly someone from another world, but this was not the issue.

Rika remembered that some time back, after she had been princess carried like this, something crazy happened.

“You probably won’t fall down, but it’s better for you to hold on.”

“Eh? Wait, Emi?”

“We’re going.”

Emi, who was hugging Rika, stepped on the windowsill which Rika had just looked out of—

“Wait a mo……………………………” Rika’s voice dissipated in the vast sky.

In the next instant, without any time to scream, Rika flew into the unfamiliar sky.

The gradually approaching ground entered her wide field of vision.

But, the speed was not as fast as falling directly.

When she realized that the speed of Emi descent was slower than the thrill rides in the amusement park, Rika saw it.

The figures of those gathered below.

There were many humans. They were dressed in various types of armor and clothing and were from different races, but those people were still within Rika’s range of understanding.

But the other figures were different.

“W-W-Wha…”

Beasts which walked on two legs.

Giants the size of a small house.

The ones flying in the sky were not birds, but people with the appearance of birds.

Dwarves whose heights did not reach the waist of a grown human.

Skeletal displays which could walk, just like the characters appearing in the ghost stories she heard when she was young.

Then, amongst these strange entities, Rika discovered Chiho wearing a triangular head cloth and apron, standing on a block and using a large rod to stir a large pot.

“This is the Demon Fortress. This is what the Demon King and the others… Maou, Ashiya, and Urushihara, what they used as a stronghold when they invaded Ente Isla in the past, the real Demon Fortress.”

“What is going onnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn?”

Emi frowned because of Rika’s scream, but she still looked a little happy.

Amongst those on the ground, including Chiho, a few people (a few creatures?) looked up in confusion when they heard Rika’s scream.

“Ah! Suzuki-san!”

Once Chiho recognized Emi and Rika, she jumped off the block in front of the huge pot and ran towards the place where the two of them landed.

“T-T-T-T-Th-Th-Th-This, This….”

“Suzuki-san! You’re awake! Sorry! It’s because I didn’t explain the landing properly!”

“That’s right, Chiho-chan. I understand your feelings, but pay attention to that in the future, okay? If Bell did not happen to be free at that time, there might not have been immediate treatment at all.”

“Yes! I’m sorry!”

Chiho earnestly apologized to Emi who berated her.

“This, this, this, this, this, this…”

“Rika? I’m putting you down now, okay? Are you alright?”

Emi put Rika on the ground after saying this, but Rika, unable to keep up with the scene in front of her, fell to the ground after walking a few steps.

“Rika! Are you alright?”

“Do you still feel pain anywhere?”

Emi and Chiho ran towards Rika.

“This sense of reality.”

Rika answered.

“Rika?”

“This sense of reality is too strong,” Rika said in a dazed manner. “I had heard about this many times, but hearing about it and seeing it is still different after all. I’m sorry, I’m a little weak at the knees. Fu—Ente Isla. This is a foreign world, fu—”

Rika looked off in the far distance, and spoke her conclusion aloud, “This is super scary.”

“Miss Rika Suzuki. I have heard that in the foreign world of Japan, you have supported Hero Emilia a lot in both work and private matters. I command the Five Continent Knight Alliance; my name is Heather Lumark. I’m not yet experienced enough, but I am currently a General. Let us get along from now on.”

“Yeah…”

“Because of the different cultures, we might come across as rude sometimes, but a benefactor of Hero Emilia is a benefactor of the whole of Ente Isla. During your stay here, if you require anything, you can let the Knight Troops know at any time. We will try our best so you do not feel inconvenienced.”

“Yeah…”

After Chiho, an important friend of Hero Emilia appeared.

After receiving this news, the one who came to tent Rika used as a temporary resting place was Heather Lumark, who commanded all the human forces in this place.

As for Rika, the one being greeted, she was unable to get used to the situation in which this grand looking person wearing shiny armor was in front of her, bowing respectfully and speaking to her in Japanese, and the fact that she was sitting in an expensive and soft chair which she had never sat in before,

drinking from an expensive tea set which she did not even dare to touch at first. And at this moment—

“Hmph, human, you’re a friend under the MgRonalds Barista Demon General Chiho, huh.”

A monster which looked like a supersized human shaped cockroach appeared together with Chiho.

“I’m Farfarello. A military officer in the Demon King Army. Together with the humans here, I’m making preparations for the upcoming battle.”

“O-Okay.”

This demon, whose name could not be remembered just by hearing it once, looked at Chiho standing beside him and said, “Any friend of the Her Excellency, Chiho, is our friend. Demons are unable to display as much consideration as humans, but please relax and take a break here.”

“T-Thank you.”

That scythe looked like it could easily cut Chiho and Rika in half, but this demon with a name, which could not be recalled after hearing it once, seemed to respect Chiho, seeing her as someone of higher rank.

“Erm, Chiho-chan, I would like to ask a rather rude question.”

“Yes?”

“What does that MgRonalds Barista mean?”

Chiho looked at Rika and Farfarello in turn, and smiled, “Ah, that is something like my nickname in the Demon World.”

“Eh…”

No matter what kind of information she heard, Rika only felt that this information had become a mess in her mind.

“Chiho-chan, didn’t he address you as Her Excellency just now? Are you a sorceress or a superpower user after all?”

“It’s really hard to explain.”

Looking like she was going to cry, Rika looked towards Chiho and Emi in turn.

“Is this a question which can be explained away so easily?”

After Farfarello left, Rika saw many people and demons busily entering and leaving the camp, then, as if she had suddenly remembered something, she placed her hand against her chest.

“Then again, that person whose name sounds like a softener, is that a demon?”

“You’re talking about Farel-san?”

“Eh? I thought his name was longer…”

“It’s a nickname. Farfarello is too long after all.”

“Demon’s nickname… huh. A-Anyway, he’s a demon, right? But just now, I…”

Rika discovered that she did not feel any of the pain when she was facing Demon General Alsiel.

Thinking about it carefully, there were so many demons walking around, so there should be a lot of demonic magic in the surroundings…

“This should be considered a blessing in disguise.”

Chiho started to explain guiltily.

“When leaving the ‘Gate,’ I forgot to remind Suzuki-san to be careful when landing, so you hit your head and fainted. When Suzuno-san was helping with the treatment, she helped you put in some preventive measures at the same time using holy magic, allowing you to be alright even if you’re exposed to a certain level of demonic magic.”

At that time, Chiho was also harshly lectured by Suzuno, but that was not relevant now.

“Erm, is it called a barrier?”

“No, it activates the holy magic within the body, using that to counteract the demonic magic. Ente Isla’s atmosphere is filled with holy magic, so it’s easier to handle it here compared to Japan.”

“…It’s no good, I don’t understand at all. It’s like listening to someone explain a game on a platform I do not own.”

“Simply put, unless someone at the level of Maou-san in his Demon King form uses his full power and stands in front of you, there shouldn’t be any problems…”

“That’s right! Maou-san!”

After hearing Maou’s name, Rika stood up with a lot of force, and, almost overturning the tea cup from earlier, she suddenly stopped where she stood.

“Where is Maou-san!? Situation! Hurry up and explain to me his situation! I still don’t understand it all, but I want an explanation of the situation! I already know that this is Ente Isla! I know that, but why was I brought here? Why are Emi and all of you here? Why has Chiho-chan assimilated into the environment here so naturally!? The other people! What happened to the other residents of the Sasazuka apartment!? Hurry up and explain it to me please!”

“Uh…”

“Where should we start…”

Just as Chiho and Emi looked at each other.

“Hey, I heard Suzuki Rika is here?”

The trio’s faces turned towards the entrance of the tent.

A human looking man stood there.

However, Rika knew him.

That man was the King of Demons who had tried to trample over this world, over Emi's hometown.

"Maou… san."

"Oh."

Just as Rika remembered, Maou Sadao was wearing jeans and a UNIxLO shirt, looking like a young man commonly seen in Japan.

"Oh, Chi-chan is here too, Happy New Year."

"Yeah, Happy New Year, Maou-san. I brought the Kombu Tsukudani[5] which Ashiya-san wanted me to buy, I'll give it to you during the meal later."

"Emi… is this really reality?"

In this place which felt very surreal to Rika, a very realistic sounding conversation appeared, if this was not a dream, then what was it?

“It’s reality. I felt that it was unbelievable too, but this is an important reality.”

Then, Rika’s good friend showed a happy smile.

※

“It’s all because that idiot Emerada said something about holding a Christmas party.”

Maou Sadao sat in front of the kotatsu placed on the tatami which had been forcefully arranged in the throne room, holding a rice bowl in his left hand, and picking up the Tsukudani which Chiho had brought with his chopsticks, it did not look any different from when they were in Room 201 of Villa Rosa Sasazuka.

“If they say it is for Alas=Ramus’s sake, I have to go even if the location is Emi’s house.”

The problem was this was the actual Demon Fortress, it was not the wall of the sixty-year-old wooden apartment behind Maou, it was a spacious throne hall, and it was also the location of the final battle between the Demon King and Hero.

“However, if everyone bought presents for Alas=Ramus separately, there might be overlaps. And for me, busy with the full-timer promotion training, I

can’t spare any time to buy presents. Therefore, I suggested everyone that regardless of how much they value Alas=Ramus, giving her so many presents and spoiling her isn’t that good. It would be better to ask Alas=Ramus what she wants then everyone would pool their money together to buy it.”

“I see, I think that decision is quite good.”

It was curious what Urushihara, who did not earn any money, was going to do, but pointing this out was not sensible at all.

“Presents are considered a success when they make the other party happy, if they can be used, that would be lucky. Therefore, we just have to inject some heart and pick appropriately. This is a lesson from Kisaki-san. However, this is a first-time experience for Alas=Ramus, if we intentionally plan a surprise and she doesn’t like it, then everyone will be depressed. Therefore, I asked Emi to nonchalantly ask Alas=Ramus what she wanted, then…”

Early morning the next day, Emi ran to Room 201 with tears in her eyes.

When Maou and the others who answered the door were in chaos, Emi turned silent once she entered the Demon Fortress, and only asked Maou and the others to get Chiho and Suzuno to come over.

Once the two of them heard about Emi’s situation, they gathered at Room 201 without any protest.

The night before, Emi nonchalantly asked Alas=Ramus if there was anything she wanted.

Alas=Ramus loved cream corn soup.

Because of Emi’s influence, she also liked curry.

She also liked Rilakkuma, or toys and plushies of small animals.

『Alas=Ramus… said she wanted to meet everyone.』

Emi squeezed this out tearfully, feeling at a loss.

『At the beginning, I didn’t understand what she was saying. Did everyone refer to the Demon King, Chiho-chan, or Suzuno… but, it wasn’t like this.』

Everyone had a premonition, and sucked in a breath.

『She said she wanted to see ‘Malkuth’ and the others, and didn’t want anything else.』

Emi’s words caused everyone to become speechless.

Emi’s tears thoroughly shattered everyone’s happy emotions as they thought about what present to buy Alas=Ramus.

『Demon King, everyone, I’m an idiot. This child, since a long time ago, she always wanted to see Acies and Iron. Yet I looked the other way. I... really am an idiot.』

As if to tightly hug Alas=Ramus who had not appeared, Emi hugged her own chest and squatted down.

『I…… was only concerned about my own issues.』

Time, which felt like forever, passed.

In actual fact, it was probably only less than a minute.

However, this period of time was enough to change the thoughts of everyone gathered in Room 201.

『Hey… Demon King.』

Without wiping her tears, Emi looked at Maou directly.

『Can, I go?』

『……Uh!』

Maou sucked in a breath.

Why was she asking for his permission? Why was she saying such words to him?

『I don’t care about Ente Isla, I don’t care about the human crisis, but I treasure this child with all my heart, so I can’t ignore it.』

It did not matter whether Alas=Ramus was a “Yesod” fragment, or that she was merged with the holy sword, all of those were unimportant.

『This child is my…』

『Ahhhhhhhh damn it!』

Maou suddenly shouted loudly.

He could not allow Emi to continue talking by herself.

He could not allow Emi to carry the sins of everyone present.

Just this, was absolutely not allowed.

Maou scratched his head with force.

『Ashiya!』

『Y-Yes!』

『Urushihara!』

『Yeah.』

『Chi-chan!』

『Yes…』

『Suzuno!』

『Yes.』

『…Emi.』

『…Demon King.』

After Maou waited for Emi to raise her head, he looked at her straight in the eyes and said, 『All— of us, are stubborn idiots! Is that okay?』

None of the people present rebuked Maou.

"About the Sephirah and the Tree of Life, you probably heard about it when Ashiya was captured. Lailah and Gabriel hoped we could defeat those people, treating Alas=Ramus's family as hostages. Because Alas=Ramus could not meet with them, she felt very lonely. If so, there is only one thing we should do."

After Maou ate one bowl of rice, Tsukudani, and miso soup, he placed the empty dishes on the kotatsu, placed his hands together and said, "Let Alas=Ramus meet with those people. Our daughter's important… friends? Brothers and sisters? Or cousins? We don't know their actual relationship, but we are going to beat up those people who do not treat them with respect. It seems like after we send Ignora flying, we would have completed Lailah's request at the same time, but I don't care about that. To us, there is nothing of higher priority than Alas=Ramus."

Rika looked at the empty bowl, and smiled slightly.

Because everything made sense now.

"A sentence was enough to overturn everything huh."

"Hmm?"

“Chiho-chan said it, she said there was one sentence which could instantly change the thoughts of Emi, Maou-san, and the others who have been working hard for your lives in Japan.”

Rika nodded, then looked at Maou who had finished his snack and the throne hall.

“This six tatami mat room feels like a joke.”

“It’s amazing, right? This is my Demon King Fortress, but strictly speaking, this is not my creation.”

“Is that so? I heard that Maou-san fixed the Shuto Expressway before, so I thought you built this.”

After Rika said this, Maou shook his head and replied, “I did the exterior, but the things inside existed in the Demon World since a long time ago. As for how long, they’re probably things from when the Ancient Demon King mentioned by Gabriel… when Sataniel came to the Demon World.”

Maou stacked the dishes, left the tatami, and walked to the window from before. Rika also followed behind him.

“Did you hear about why those people in Heaven are currently using the moon as their base? Because they parked the whole immigrant city from the moon of their home planet there.”

“Yeah, I roughly heard about it.”

Rika nodded, and looked at the sky from the window.

Two clearly shaped midday moons floated there.

“Not long after Ignora and the others left their home planet, they used the samples they obtained from Kael and Shakeenah as a foundation, and developed a technique to make humans immortal. They conducted operations in stages, and as they collected data, they looked for a planet humans could live on.”

“That was a very long process. I remember when I first moved to Japan, I was so tired after only viewing five apartments.”

“If it was all in one day, five apartments are too much. Won’t you get confused on the good and bad points of each apartment?”

Maou’s ordinary response caused Rika to nod in satisfaction.

“Anyway, they settled down there in the end. To prevent a second assault from Kael and Shakeenah, they planned to control Ente Isla’s Tree of Life. However, Sataniel turned against Ignora, who planned to rebuild Paradise. Sataniel had planned to remove the immortality after finding a place to settle down, allowing everyone to live in a pristine world as humans after all. However, Ignora and the others, who had witnessed the stupidity of humans, did not think that way. They wanted to guide the Ente Isla humans, who had just been chosen by the Tree of Life, towards Paradise. Part of the angels, including Sataniel and Lailah, protested greatly, but most of the angels supported Ignora. Do you know why?”

“…Why?”

“Even after becoming immortal, they still treasured their own life. No one wants to proactively give up their body which would never fall sick or go hungry. Therefore, after Sataniel snatched away his son Lucifer and the ‘Yesod’ Sephirah, which had been used by Ignora and the others as the basis for the immortality technology, he ran away. It was so that the nightmare of immortality would not expand to the humans of this new planet.”

“Yesod… refers to Alas=Ramus-chan and Acies, right?”

“Yeah. The basis of Ignora’s research was from Kael and Shakeenah who were born from their home planet’s Sephirah. Therefore, they would naturally want to use the ‘Yesod’ and ‘Malkuth’ from this planet as a basis for the immortality research for this planet.”

“To my brain which has become messed up because fantasy turned into reality, this topic is too difficult.”

“Perhaps… we’re going to take a trip down now.”

“Yeah, please go easy on me.”

Rika, being carried by Maou on his back, descended from the window located at an extremely high altitude once again.

And the reason was actually to wash the dishes from just now, faced with this fact, Rika could only laugh.

During the period of time the King of Demons went to find water to wash the dishes, Rika was finally able to re-survey this camp with a calmer mind.

This camp, which was set up at the foot of the hill which the Demon Fortress was situated upon, operated under the joint command of General Heather Lumark, whom Rika had greeted before, and the overall Chief of the Malebranches, Farfarello.

And the ones who pulled the strings between the demons and humans who had been killing each other a few years ago were the Hakin Knight Troops

from the Eastern Continent who had fallen under the demons' control during the earlier commotion and Ashiya.

As for the formation for the troops, besides Emerada, Suzuno, Urushihara, and Lailah, even Chiho had to stand at the front and take command.

The purpose of this group on the surface was to "Take apart the Demon Fortress." Then "Making the demons return to the Demon World and act as if the remnants of the demons have been killed." Simply put, these were post battle arrangements to remove any signs of the invasion and allowed the defeated soldiers to return to their country.

Other than a portion of the demons lead by Farfarello, most of the demons present were survivors of the troops Maou and the others had brought along to conquer Ente Isla.

The outline of the plan was top secret, and the reason Maou did not transform to his demon form and continued to move around in a human form was to decrease the amount of chaos which would occur if this information was leaked to people who believed that the Demon King Satan had been killed by Hero Emilia.

"Sataniel planned to part ways with the immigrant city, but not only did Ignora, Kamael, and the other angels not allow it, they saw his actions as a form of human stupidity and mocked him. This is despite the fact that they were the ones who one-sidedly decided to 'guide' the humans."

“The humans of Ente Isla did not notice anything at that time?”

“Don’t expect so much. Using Japan as a reference, Ente Isla at that time was equivalent to the era when the whole world was in the Jomon period.”[6]

“Ah, I see, I forgot that the people of Heaven have very long lifespans. Because the scale of the situation is too huge, I don’t really understand it anymore.”

“I’m almost done, you can take notes later and revise properly. It’s going to be tested.”

While Maou was explaining, he had finished washing the dishes, dried them, and placed them at their designated location.

“The Sephirah will choose those humans who should be helped. But the other humans who had lost the battle of survival had not yet gone extinct. Those guys who had not been chosen by the Sephirah, Ignora did something crazy to them.”

“…Something crazy?”

“That’s right. Those humans who were not chosen by the Sephirah became experimental subjects for genetic modification, to test the immortality technology which had been developed after Sataniel stole the ‘Yesod.’”

“H-Human experimentation?”

“Exactly. At this point, Lailah and Sataniel were really angry. They decided to carry out a complete resistance, and those people who were taken to be experimented on definitely wanted to live as well. They had not been chosen by the Tree of Life, but those people were still human. Not all the people who had been modified would obediently listen to Ignora and the others. Through attracting those people, Sataniel increased the power of his own faction. It seemed like he wanted to protect those people.”

At this moment, Rika realized that when Maou mentioned “those people,” his expression had become serene.

And the direction he looked must have been towards those strange looking creatures — which would be the demons.

“W-Wait, Maou-san, please wait a moment. Could it be that those people who became human experiments, the humans who had not been chosen by the Sephirah…”

“The immortality research regressed because they lost ‘Yesod,’ and later Shakeenah’s, the ‘Malkuth’ Sephirah’s genes were used as a sample for the

basis of the research. Because it was a Sephirah which oversaw Matter, they were implanted with incomplete immortality, other than obtaining a body which would not die even if they did not eat and a lifespan which was not permanently extended, various physical changes happened to their body. Such as growing horns, growing wings, or growing tails… even the energy stored within their hearts was no longer holy magic."

As if confirming Rika's guess, Maou pointed at a place a short distance ahead, there were many other large sized comrades gathering around the pot where Chiho had been cooking soup earlier.

"We demons apparently used to be 'humans.' We're just from a species different from the humans prevalent in Ente Isla now."

"Uwah."

After listening to the unexpected history of creation, Rika let out an airheaded sound which was similar to a yawn.

"These things…"

"Ashiya and Urushihara obviously know, Emi, Chi-chan, Suzuno, Emerada, Alberto, Emi's father, Acies, Iron, Amane-san, and Landlady-san know as well. And to carry out this plan smoothly, we also told Farfarello, the Knight Alliance, with Lumark being the main point of contact, and some of the sorcerers at the Saint Aire Sorcery Management Institute, which is controlled

by Emerada. In addition, that person isn't here, but there is an old geezer who is ruling the demons in my place, I contacted him as well. Then, you now know too."

"Among those people, I feel like I'm the one who does not need to know these things the most."

"What are you talking about? History is something which should be passed down by observers like you who maintain a certain distance from the core of the events."

"I feel happy that you have said that, but when history descends into chaos, personal voices and thoughts get suppressed easily, right?"

After Rika said this, she observed Maou carefully.

There was no need to confirm it again at this time, but the human form of "Maou Sadao" in front of her was exactly the same as that of the "humans" which Rika knew.

Rika knew that Maou had originally become like this because he had lost his demonic magic, but she could not help but theorize whether this meant that this "human appearance" was the core of this organism known as a demon.

But like this, another question arose.

Or rather, didn't Maou ever wonder about this before?

"However, why do the Tree of Life and Sephirah want to choose humans?"

"Hmm?"

Maou wiped the dishes dry, and listened distractedly to the question which naturally came out of Rika's mouth.

Rika did not think that there was any deep meaning to what she said; there was an Afsahan born Hakin Knight working diligently far away, she looked at that place and said, "Because to me, those people from the Knight Alliance and the current Maou-san and Ashiya-san don't look different in appearance at all. Based on what was said just now, Maou-san and the others are considered descendants of the 'humans who weren't chosen.' However, there should be a reason why the Tree of Life chose the current Ente Isla humans, right? What kind of standards did it use to choose, and why can it only choose one type of human to save?"

"Hmm…"

Maou replied in a distracted manner, but he subconsciously stopped his actions of wiping the dishes.

"…Probably, there is a reason which only they know about. This is really known by God itself, I guess?"

“Hmm. Haah, ignoring Maou-san for now, those over there don’t bear any resemblance at all. I wonder what the difference is, or whether it really is an issue at the DNA level.”

After Rika shifted her gaze to the group of strangely shaped organisms which were definitely “demons,” and showed an expression of understanding.

“Then again, the demons who were captured by Ignora as human experiments, why are they in the Demon World now? They should have been similar to slaves at that time, right?”

“Ah, yeah.”

On the other hand, Maou, who had a peculiar stern expression on his face like something was stuck in his throat, decided to cast aside this doubt for now. He placed the dried dishes at their designated location, and steered the topic back to its original direction.

“About that, Sataniel lost all hope because of Ignora’s craziness in creating demons and officially cut his ties with the city. In terms of battle tactics, the battle forces which Ignora’s side could organize were far stronger than Sataniel’s, so there was a need to keep a distance from her. Sataniel had to protect the demons and lead the small number of angels who agreed with his ideals to organize an army in a place far away from Ignora, so Sataniel created the Demon World. Literally, he split the moon. The geological impact

it caused could not be fathomed… Haah, Sataniel was a scientist, so he probably chose the most suitable time. It's currently a barren planet inhabited by demons, but the Demon World at that time was truly an ark ridden by the protectors who would protect Ente Isla from the hands of the invaders from outer space… Satan's arc (Satanasarc)."

Demon King Capital Satanasarc.

The royal city where the Ancient Demon King Satan had lived in the past. The legends there were spread amongst the many demons, and even Maou, who planned to unify the Demon World, had heard them before, the living quarters of the Ancient Demon King in the past, was what Sataniel split from the immigrant city of their home planet, an arc which could traverse across space.

"When I arrived at the royal city, the records of the final battle between Sataniel and Ignora and the others still remained. When I saw them for the first time, I did not know what they meant," Maou said in a nostalgic tone. "Sataniel lost in the battle with Ignora and lost his life. The angels who followed Sataniel scattered, and the demons, who were not mature humans to begin with, could only move to various locations in the Demon World. Without knowing anything myself, this Demon Fortress was something split from the Satanasarc which Sataniel left behind."

"Eh?"

“The ‘Gate’ can transport a rather large number of people far away in one go, but there is a limit. I wanted to use the demons who could open a ‘Gate’ as part of my forces to conquer Ente Isla. So we used this. Currently, Ashiya and Urushihara are commanding the demons and the knights of the Eastern Continent to fix the engine parts of the Demon Fortress. The Sorcery Management Institute managed by Emerada are also providing their assistance.”

“T-T-This means that this whole fortress… is a spaceship? Can such a huge thing fly in the air?”

In the past, the Demon Fortress suddenly appeared at the largest city in the Central Continent Isla Kentorum, and destroyed that place in one night, but what actually happened was that it had literally “squashed” that place.

Using a physical method, the Demon Fortress squashed Isla Kentorum from above and directly replaced its location, then together with some demons, Maou disguised its exterior appearance so that it looked like a castle.

“If it wasn’t something of that scale, there would be no way to transport the number of battle forces we had planned for. But honestly speaking, the splitting at that time was done rather sloppily, I had regretted not using the Demon Fortress more effectively. Whether we can make the Demon Fortress fly again is the most important crux of the plan to prepare Alas=Ramus’s present.”

“I see, Maou-san and the others came here to give Alas=Ramus-chan a present.”

Because the scale of the history of creation was too huge, Rika forgot about one thing.

This huge war which involved three worlds and many races was started for the sake of giving a little girl a present.

“That’s right. So we do not plan to fight seriously in an unrelated place. And from the day after tomorrow, I still have to participate in the full-timer promotion training.”

Thus, Rika momentarily could not understand what Maou had said.

“……What did you say just now?”

“Eh? What I meant is that my first work shift of the year is the day after tomorrow, so I have to return to Sasazuka for that. Emi has a work shift tomorrow morning, so she said that she would return to Eifuku tonight. As for Chi-chan, she comes and leaves on the same day, we can’t allow her to camp out for an extended period during New Year after all.”

“Eh? What? Eh? Sorry, I don’t understand what you’re saying. Chiho-chan! Chiho-chan!”

“Ah, alright! Sorry, can you switch with me for a bit?”

Chiho, who noticed that Rika was calling her, passed the responsibility of watching the pot to the demon next to her and walked over briskly.

A high school girl passed the stirring rod to a demon who was several times larger than a human and had a scary appearance, but the latter obediently continuing the stirring, made this scene more amusing.

In the first place, demons did not have to eat, so with regards about having to cook here, the demon probably felt it was strange.

“Chiho-chan? Didn’t you say that Maou-san and Emi wanted to quit their job at MgRonalds?”

“Eh? I probably didn’t say such things before.”

Chiho, who was called over, widened her eyes in surprise.

“Y-You said it before. You said that they had already settled everything, and there wouldn’t be any problems even if they were not around.”

“Yes, so Yusa-san and Maou-san had a proper discussion on the work shifts and adjusted their schedules so the work at MgRonalds would not overlap with this.”

"……Huh?"

"If a 'Gate' is used, it will take about forty minutes for a one-way trip to return to Sasazuka, Maou-san and Yusa-san will still be working normally at Sasazuka after this, you know? Though the frequency might decrease a little."

"…One way, forty minutes… Oh… I see."

A forty minute trip in one direction, by taking the Rapid Train on the Keio Line, it would be enough to go from Shinjuku station to the terminal station Keio-hachioji Station.

By setting off from Takadanobaba where Rika lived, then Shin-Tokorozawa Station could be reached by taking the Express Train on the Seibu-Shinjuku Line, by taking the Tokyo Metro East-West Line, it might be possible to reach the terminal station Nishi-Funabashi Station.

Atami could not be reached within that time by taking the Tokaido Shinkansen from Tokyo Station, but taking it to Odawara Station would be about forty minutes.

By taking the Tohoku Shinkansen, it would probably just reach Oyama Station in Tochigi Prefecture.

“I don’t know if this other world is considered near or far anymore!”

Rika grabbed her head and crouched down.

Chiho looked at Rika out of the corner of her eye, her hand was holding onto the glowing feather pen which had also been taken out in Room 201.

“As long as we use this, a ‘Gate’ can be opened even if the person does not possess any holy magic. If you don’t mind, I will help Suzuki-san ask for one. Lailah-san or Gabriel-san will help us make one as long as we ask them. As for the way to use it, the trick to using it can be learned after asking Emerada-san to teach for one hour…”

“It’s not like riding a bicycle! What is this!? Why are you making it sound so easy!? Chiho-chan was so sullen when you were at the apartment and you made it sound like we’d never see Emi and the others again, and in the end, what is this!?”

“Eh? Did I make it sound that way? Sorry, because I was a little sleepy from waking up too early, and wasn’t it cold at that time? Therefore, my way of speaking subconsciously became very short and simple, I’m sorry if it sounded cold and aloof… Maou-san, can you believe it!? The temperature in the city actually dropped to two degrees below zero today! I almost thought I would catch a cold.”

"Two degrees below zero is very cold, in contrast, this place is very close to the equator and is very warm, it's so troublesome to decide what to wear."

"Both of you are too laid back! Return my tears and serious feelings!"

Looking at this objectively, Rika sounded more reasonable, but regretfully, this did not work on Chiho and Maou right now.

"Oh yes, if you want to ride a bicycle, I can lend you one. This is your first time in Ente Isla, right? If you want to tour the nearby areas, the Mopeds which broke after Suzuno and I rode them here seem to have been fixed after Alberto tried his best to gather all the parts and repaired them, so I can lend those to you. They're the same as the Mopeds used by Mags for delivery, so they're very safe, you won't fall over even if you're riding it for the first time. There's no need to worry about licenses here too, and because there's two of them, why don't I ask Ashiya to show you around? I heard that you helped him a lot when buying a mobile phone."

"Is this really a foreign world? How can there be a foreign world with Mopeddds!? Where the heck am I!? And please don't let me meet Ashiya-san now! Don't mess up my thoughts even more than this!"

"Huh?"

"Maou-san, the relationship between Suzuki-san and Ashiya-san is a little awkward now."

“O-Oh? I don’t really understand.”

Maou did not know what had happened between Rika and Ashiya at all.

He only thought that Rika had helped to provide suggestions when Ashiya was buying a phone, like what she did when they were buying televisions.

“It feels like things have become chaotic.”

“Oh, Emi.”

“Yusa-san.”

Seeing Rika roughly grabbing her head and groaning, Emi walked over from within the tent.

“It’s stranger not to feel confused after encountering this kind of thing!”

“Ri nee-chan, what’s wrong?”

And Emi was carrying Alas=Ramus in her arms, Rika did not know whether to laugh or to shout anymore.

“Sorry, Alas=Ramus-chan! It seems like Onee-san has lost something important! If I see Alas=Ramus’s face at this time, I will start thinking about stupid things like 『Ah, I forgot to buy souvenirs.』 I’m not supposed to have time to think about things like that!”

“…I don’t understand.”

“I think so too!”

Emi, who gradually began to pity Rika, passed Alas=Ramus to Maou, then lightly hugged Rika’s shoulders as she groaned continuously.

“Hey, think of it this way. We have moved to the suburbs due to some family related reasons. The station to go to those suburbs is located at Sasazuka. After the New Year’s, if there are no unexpected situations, I will return to my Eifuku apartment and spend the night there. Recently, Bell has been unable to leave the apartment for long periods of time, so she will return to Room 202. After all, when Chiho-chan comes here, someone needs to send her home. Because the Demon King and the others have to repair the Demon Fortress, they had no choice but to move their living necessities here, but the way we live has not changed much. Hey, look there.”

Emi looked straight at the Demon Fortress.

“You can accept it if you see this as a huge six tatami apartment room, right?”

"…You're asking for too much."

Emi's explanation was too ridiculous, but it restored Rika's smile.

"Impossible~ it's totally impossible. I'm so frustrated, Emi and Maou-san are always giving me huge shocks. What do you mean by a huge six tatami room, huh? I can't laugh at all. This six tatami room can fly into space, right? This is too ridiculous, it only gives the feeling of being in a dream."

"Unfortunately, this is reality. We are going to use this Demon Fortress to attack Heaven. Since the 'Gate' has been sealed, only this method is left."

Maou walked towards the exterior wall of the fortress and placed his small hand on it.

"As for what happens after… hey, Emi, what plans do you have for the future?"

"Who knows? I'll think about it later."

Currently, Maou and Emi were proactively working with each other as Alas=Ramus's father and mother, moving towards the same goal.

However, it had to be remembered that most of the citizens of Ente Isla did not know about this battle involving Maou and the others, including the old

Isla Kentorum which was flattened by the Demon Fortress, it was an unchangeable fact that Maou and the others have caused a lot of tragedies.

“I’m not the Hero anymore. Whether it is during the battle, or after the end of the battle, I will definitely be thinking about how to spend next Christmas with Alas=Ramus.”

“How peaceful.”

“It’s actually very peaceful in reality.”

Chiho responded to Rika’s comment.

“Everyone had their fill of feeling troubled, battling, and feeling exhausted. There won’t be any bad karma if they start to think about constructive things for their own sake.”

“…You’re acting like you have a lot of leeway, but Emi’s words from just now can be interpreted in other ways, you know?”

In some sense, Rika was actually warning Chiho, but Chiho replied with a tone and expression filled with fighting spirit, “It’s what I wanted. No matter who my opponent is, I don’t plan to admit defeat.”

“Haah, as long as Chiho-chan feels that it’s good.”

Rika pouted as if she felt it was boring.

At this moment.

『Demon King-sama, may I interrupt for a bit?』

His figure could not be seen, but Ashiya's voice was suddenly heard in the surroundings.

Rika flinched, blushing greatly, as for Chiho, Emi, and Maou, they looked up slightly.

"What is it, Ashiya."

『Actually… oh? Are there other people around besides Emilia and Sasaki-san? I feel the presence of a human.』

"Ah~ erm, it's nothing, if you have something to say, then just say it quickly?"

Standing next to Rika, Chiho kept positioning her arms in a X shape in a gesture of denial, so Maou replied vaguely even as he felt perplexed.

『Alright… actually, we discovered some troublesome issues.』

“Troublesome issues?”

『Yes. We discovered that if we continue on like this, we will be unable to fully restore the Demon Fortress. Urushihara said many locations, including the Ignition System, Turbine System, and Fuel System, have problems.』

“Are they parts which cannot be repaired using demonic magic?”

『It seems like some of the parts in certain places need to be re-made from scratch. Urushihara will probably directly contact you later, but this is the report I have received.』

“Remade from scratch huh… this is something originating from Heaven, what should we do? There won’t be blueprints lying around so conveniently, right? Is what we did so rough that it broke this much?”

『I feel that flattening Isla Kentorum directly should be considered a very rough action.』

Seeing Maou become depressed because of what Ashiya said, Emi could only show a troubled smile.

『If we only want to fly, it might be possible to think of something, but we will probably encounter a counterattack when we attack Heaven. Therefore, it is better to decrease the unpredictable factors as much as possible.』

“That’s true, but the problem is where to get the parts.”

『One of the things is confirmed to be in the Northern Continent of Ente Isla. The rest of them should be in the Demon World.』

At this moment, Urushihara’s voice interrupted the conversation.

“The Northern Continent and the Demon World?”

『Yeah. For the Demon World, it will be better to contact Camio and ask him to get people to look for them. I don’t know where they are, but I know all the things which are needed.』

“Seriously?”

Urushihara was speaking in a rare serious tone, so when Maou replied, there was excitement in his voice.

“What are those things?”

『The Ancient Demon King Satan’s Legacy, Noah Gear.』

Urushihara said in a strong tone.

“Noah Gear?”

『That was what Satan… Sataniel called that thing. Regarding the events of that time, this is one of the few things I still remember. He said that if there is a need to return to the moon in the future, that thing will become the key to starting up the arc (Satanasarc).』

“How do you know that it’s in the Demon World?”

『Because Heaven is looking for that thing. Ignora should know that those things are needed to revive the Satanasarc. She even sent Gabriel to ask me about it before.』

“Oh~ so what is it?”

In response to Maou’s question, Urushihara replied in a serious voice, 『Nothung, Adramelechinus’ demonic spear, Ginkan no Mado, and the Astral Gem, these four treasures. Sataniel is really idiotic. Try stringing the first syllable of these things together.』

“Hm…? No, a…ahhhh?”

There should be a limit even when fooling children.

This could not even be called Shiritori.

However, the meaning within was clear.

The Nothung and Demonic Spear were just weapons.

Mado was just a chemical formula.

The Astral Gem was simply an energy crystal.

These things were amazing existences, but they were not irreplaceable.

However, when these things were gathered in the right place, the Ancient Demon King’s Legacy would become a gear to activate the ark.

“Seriously, no matter where we go, we are led around by the nose by conflicts from the past.”

『Exactly.』

“Do you have a right to say such a thing? All of this is caused by your parents, right?”

『I don’t care. Who wants to take responsibility for those parents who can only cause a bad impact to their children’s future? Maou is a parent now, be careful not to become that kind of irresponsible father, okay? Then, I have finished what I have to say.』

After the Idea Link ended, the area fell silent once again.

“The meaning of that conversation just now is… the spaceship cannot move yet?”

“That’s how it is, the number of things we have to search for has increased. Poor people have no time to rest, this saying is really appropriate.”

Maou stretched the muscles in his neck and said this leisurely, after he breathed in deeply, he gathered up his motivation and spoke, “Emi, Chi-chan.”

“Yeah.”

“Yes!”

“I don’t plan to drag it until Christmas next year.”

After saying this, Maou looked straight into Alas=Ramus’s eyes.

“Papa, what is it?”

“Your birthday.”

“Uh?”

“Alas=Ramus, I’m going to end everything before your birthday.”

“Maou-san, Alas=Ramus-chan’s birthday refers to…”

“Isn’t it obvious?”

Maou showed a smile with deep meaning, and raised Alas=Ramus high into the sky.

“Eyah!”

She did not understand the situation, but Alas=Ramus, being raised into the air, looked very happy, and on that day, everyone gathered at Room 201 witnessed the moment of this girl’s birth with their own eyes, didn’t they?

“The time limit is summer! During Tokyo Obon festival in July. Alas=Ramus, at that time, I’m going to give you the best present!”

Maou’s voice, which was filled with determination, resounded into the sky where the two midday moons were located.



Author, Afterword —AND YOU—

There are actually many opportunities to give presents in one year.

First, there are New Year’s cards and New Year’s money during New Year’s, then Valentine’s Day in February, and White Day in March which is equivalent to gift returning. For Spring, the hat trick of Mother’s Day, Children’s Day, and Father’s Day is used to determine the winner, and summer would be Chugen.[7] In September, Respect for the Aged Day would arrive in a relaxed manner, then it would be Late Autumn where people would lower their guard a little, lastly would be Christmas and New Year’s Eve at the end of the year.

In addition, we cannot forget the birthdays and the wedding anniversaries between married couples which happen throughout the year.

There are not a lot of people who take such chances to give gifts every year, and I think most people will only celebrate about half of these festivals, and depending on their status at that time, they can be the one giving or receiving presents.

However, in giving or receiving presents, Wagahara still does not comprehend “Christmas Presents.”

It is simple if adults are giving children presents.

Because a person would only need to think about what a child wants, or what they want to give the child, there are a lot of choices, including toys the child likes, books, child education products, or recently released electronics.

However, there is a regularly held event known as the “Christmas Present Exchange Amongst Adults,” and I don’t know what to give at all.

There are carnations for Mother’s Day, chocolates for Valentine’s Day, as for White Day, it would be the Valentine’s Day present times N or giving other treats in return, but there is no similar absolute guide for a Christmas present.

The presents for New Year’s Eve and Chugen are to thank others for the help and guidance which was given, and the gifts would normally be chosen from famous products from various countries or things which would help the other party’s family.

As for Father’s Day and Respect for the Aged Day, the thoughts of “Father, do your best at work” or “I hope that other party continues to stay healthy” will surface first, so either related products will be given, or the person is taken on a trip.

However, if the other party is not a devout Christian, what kind of Christmas present should be given?

Looking to examples from the world outside, if they are lovers, the male partner gives his female partner jewellery, bags, and other accessories, and the female partner gives the male partner accessories or clothes which can be used at work, but when thinking about “Do such things have to wait until Christmas to be given?” it just creates more questions.

Perhaps there are people who think that being the case, it is good to give “Christmas Limited Edition” items, but things which are limited edition during Christmas would be winter styled and cannot be used throughout the year, and when next year comes around, there would probably be new limited edition styles.

Even so, even I know that Christmas trees, roasted turkey, or cakes cannot be counted as a main present during a Christmas date between couples.

In the first place, Christmas is not like a birthday, where celebrations are held for a specific person, and it’s not like Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, or Valentine’s Day, which is a day to convey your feelings, but somehow, in modern Japan, this festival has ended up including all these functions, a day which feels like it is overcapacity.

Sometimes I feel that Christmas might be a backup day prepared for the people who missed out the chance to convey their feelings or give presents.

This might be the last chance to spend a holiday with a father who can not celebrate Father’s Day because he will be on a work trip, or a lover whose

birthday could not be celebrated because the schedules did not match, or relatives and friends who could not meet up for various reasons, while not being restricted by the festive celebrations restrictions during the days before and after New Year.

Most of the times, even if the opportunity is missed, it can be made up within a short period of time, but when feeling troubled over what Christmas present to give, perhaps you might find an answer by thinking about what you have not done for the person you’re giving the present to.

Volume 15 of 《Hataraku Maou-sama!》 talks about a story of a group of people who conveyed their increasingly complex feelings during a Christmas where various motives have accumulated.

The most important part of giving presents is the thought. The present does not have to be an item or something with monetary value!

In addition, because everyone is trying hard to celebrate Christmas, I strongly hope that for the “Thanksgiving” celebrations which have rapidly made their presence known, please do not develop an excessive present giving custom. At the same time, I hope I can meet up with everyone in the next volume.

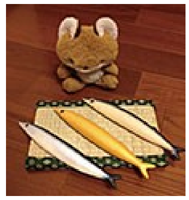
Bye!



Translator’s Notes and References

1. ↑ In some McDonald stores, they have seating areas where they use the high bar seats instead of normal chairs.
2. ↑ Kentucky Fried Chicken is usually completely booked every Christmas in Japan.
3. ↑ Ozouni is rice cake soup.
4. ↑ Daigaran refers to a complex in a buddhist temple.
5. ↑ Kombu Tsukudani is thinly cut Kombu seaweed that is cooked and seasoned mainly with sugar and Soy Sauce.
6. ↑ Jomon period was when Japan was in the late Stone age.
7. ↑ Chugen is an annual event in Japan on the 15th day of the 7th lunar month when people give gifts to their superiors and acquaintances. Originally, it was an annual event for giving gifts to the ancestral spirits.

Credits



Author: Wagahara Satoshi

Illustrator: 029 (Oniku)

Translator: mittens_220

Editors: Aardvark, Ice Phantom & NAme

Illustration Provider: http://ruranobe.ru
Illustration Editors: Frozen, Ice Phantom & Mountain of Pigeons

Compiled by Ice Phantom